

Tackling Global Diets to Curb Greenhouse Gas Emissions

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Antony Froggatt

Good evening, and welcome all to this meeting on 'Tackling Global Diets to Curb Greenhouse Gas Emissions'. My name is Antony Froggatt and I'm a senior research fellow here at Chatham House. I work in the Energy, Environment and Resources Programme. I've been asked to make three housekeeping announcements. Firstly, this is on the record, so it's not under the Chatham House Rule. You're very welcome to repeat what you hear and who said it. We would also encourage you to use Twitter, with #CHEvents.

This event is part of the Winston Churchill Programme. It commemorates the 50th anniversary of Winston Churchill's death and the 75th anniversary of his 'finest hour' in 1940, when he became prime minister. Chatham House and other organizations are remembering Churchill's legacy by supporting the 21st Century Statesmanship Global Leaders Programme and Seminar, and holding panel events such as we have here today. Panel events are being held by a number of different organizations. In October, a high-level seminar will be held in London around the theme of skill sets required of statesmen and stateswomen in the 21st century, and joining the dots from these various panels.

So the panel that we are, as Chatham House, looking at is sustainable diets and, in particular, livestock. That is because we are working on a programme that is looking at public understanding in this area, and in particular looking at four key countries: Brazil, China, the UK and the US. You'll hear more about that during this seminar.

So we have three very eminent speakers. Laura is a research associate at Chatham House and is working on the programme that I mentioned, looking at public attitudes to livestock and climate change. Prior to working at Chatham House, she was a researcher at Global Witness.

Next to her is Sue Dibb, who is coordinator of Eating Better, an alliance to help people eat less and better meat and more food that is good for people and the planet. Prior to this, she worked as director of the Food Ethics Council and head of sustainable consumption and production at the Sustainable Development Commission.

Finally, we have Professor Tim Lang, who is from City University and has for over 40 years engaged in research and debate around the directions of both local and global food policy. He's done a vast array of jobs, including for the World Health Organization and for a number of House of Commons select committees.

So in terms of the format, we're going to ask each of the speakers to present for around 8 to 10 minutes. We won't take questions in between but after that we'll have an opportunity for people to raise questions, both in the session here and then there's a reception afterwards, so we can carry on some of those discussions. If I could hand over to Laura?

Laura Wellesley

Antony has just given a brief introduction to the project that we're undertaking here at Chatham House. I just wanted to restate why it's so important that we look at meat consumption in the context of climate change, and then to put out some of the preliminary findings from some focus groups that we've been undertaking in the US and the UK to try to dig a bit deeper into public attitudes and understanding around climate change, and specifically around meat consumption. From those I want to draw out some

of the key obstacles that lie in our way as we try to encourage a shift in meat consumption to reduce the impact of the livestock sector, before briefly touching on a couple of possible solutions.

We're looking at the livestock sector because it is a major driver of climate change. The sector as a whole accounts for around 15 per cent of all greenhouse gas emissions, which is roughly equivalent to all tailpipe emissions from the world's vehicles. Most important, it's the main source of two of the most potent greenhouse gases: methane, which comes from the digestion in ruminant animals like cows and sheep and goats; and nitrous oxide from manure and from fertilizers used to produce animal feed. While improvements on the production side are going to be a really important part of the puzzle as we try to reduce the impact of the sector, recent studies have shown that without a considerable shift in meat consumption, it's very unlikely that we'll be able to keep global warming to 2 degrees, which is the internationally agreed target to try and avoid catastrophic climate change.

The problem isn't just one related to the environment. We're also consuming an unhealthy amount of meat. This chart here shows per capita daily average consumption of meats in our focus countries. The black line across the bottom is the recommended daily protein intake as put out by the World Health Organization. So it shows that we're really consuming more meat than we need to, more protein than we need to. This overconsumption of meat has some serious health implications. It's associated with an increased risk of heart disease, diabetes, bowel cancer. We've seen that as consumption of meat and particularly red meat increases, so does the incidence of these diseases.

We've got a couple of options. The first is to reduce our meat consumption. The second is to shift our meat consumption away from the worst offenders, the least climate-friendly meat options, which are effectively beef and lamb. We can move towards chicken and pork, or ideally towards more plant-based protein sources. But there are some really big challenges to encouraging this shift.

The first is that awareness of the relationship between food production, and particularly meat production, and climate change is really very low. When we spoke to our participants, we found that most said: we're exposed to discussion about CO₂ emissions from factories and cars, but we don't hear about the impact of our food production. In fact, quite a few of our participants found it really difficult to believe that the sector could have such an impact. It seemed to them quite illogical. I think that's because it involves quite a large conceptual leap for some people. The links are not obvious, especially as we see more of a disassociation between the food products in front of us and the animals from which they come.

What coverage there is, is fairly minimal and very confusing. When we're thinking about discussion of climate change more broadly, we see that people talk about the conflicting messages that they're receiving from different groups. The fact that this is still perceived to be and is a highly politicized debate – that results in quite a high degree of scepticism around new information on climate change, with a lot of people questioning the agenda behind the information and questioning vested interests. But interestingly, that doesn't negate a trust in the media to cover issues of key importance. Particularly in the UK, there remains quite a strong level of trust in traditional outlets like the BBC, the *Guardian*, *Panorama*, to cover issues that really are of key concern. So we know that the media plays a really important role in informing public perceptions around this.

But beyond awareness and media attention, there's a more fundamental challenge that faces us: our food choices are not really driven by moral considerations or by our value systems. Largely, they are driven by practical considerations: how much food costs, what it tastes like, whether it's healthy to eat, whether it's safe to eat. These are all considerations that our focus group participants and respondents to our global survey highlighted as the key factors when making their food choices.

That's influenced to quite a large extent by the environment within which we make these choices, or the 'choice architecture', as behavioural economists call it. In the UK, there was quite a consistent repetition of the idea that meat products are much more easily available in restaurants and in ready meals. I think as increasingly we look for convenient foods, we tend toward ready meals, toward pre-packaged food, in which meat is really prevalent and it's quite difficult to find vegetarian options.

But beyond that, in the US there was a statement by quite a few of our participants that vegetarianism and veganism is not a lifestyle choice that is affordable to everybody. People perceive meat alternatives to be prohibitively expensive at times. I think that does reflect quite a pervasive cheap-meat culture but it also points to a lack of understanding about what other protein sources could be and how we could use them in our food.

When we start asking people whether they would consider changing their eating habits, you start to tap into quite a deep conversation about cultural identity and national identity, particularly in America. Many people were saying: meat is a really fundamental part of the American way of life. We all grew up with meat. This is what we know. If you ask us to change meat, you're asking us to flip our whole lifestyle around. It becomes a question about identity really.

I wasn't going to mention China in this presentation, but I do think it's important to bear in mind that in China there are additional cultural dimensions to this. A move toward more meat-rich diets is closely associated with an idea of social progress and economic development. So people tend to see efforts to slow that move as fairly culturally regressive. That's going to be a really important thing to bear in mind as we try to think about culturally sensitive solutions to this problem.

So what can we do about it, in the face of challenges like this? Is it possible to influence people's decisions? Interestingly, focus group participants came up with many of the same measures or things to think about as we had ourselves thought about. The first is that people need to feel like an individual change that they're making is part of a broader effort, part of collective action on this. So a number of people in the UK said: I could stop eating meat tomorrow but it would make no difference. Our government is not going to act on this. Climate change isn't a priority. Unless we all do something about our food, there's no point in any of us doing anything at all.

Really that points to some questions about where responsibility lies to take action. Even in America, where there was more of a confidence really in the power of the individual to effect change, people did tend to come back to this notion that the state has a duty to inform us and educate us and tell us about problems that are of key importance.

There are a number of ways in which they can do that. The first is to influence our decisions at a kind of subconscious level. So make vegetarian options or meat alternatives more prominent in shops, reduce the meat content in pre-packaged foods, and start young by education schoolchildren directly on the links between climate and food, or influencing their notions of what a healthy diet looks like or where protein comes from by changing the options in school meals to more plant-based protein sources. I think most importantly, the message that came out of our research is that we need to be focusing on the health benefits of a reduced-meat diet. People don't respond really to links between climate change or environment and their food choices. We know that people are most influenced by factors that impact directly on them. So we need to be telling people that a reduced-meat diet is better for your health. It's better for the environment but really it has considerable benefits to the individual. I think this is probably where there's most leverage for action at national and international levels.

Just thinking beyond that, there are a couple of more extreme or more interventionist approaches that we could take. This could be incorporating the price of environmental damage or climate impact into the price of food, raising the price of the least climate-friendly options. It's a really difficult question politically because I think we all realize that it would likely hit the poorest the hardest. But when we're thinking about the scale of change that we need to effect, it's likely that an extreme step like that is going to be necessary.

As this is a Churchill event, I just wanted to end on this quote from Churchill, who in 1932 recognized that the way in which we produce and consume meat is really unsustainable and wasteful. He foresaw a world in 1982 where we were growing the parts of meat that we wanted. Obviously we're a bit lagging behind, but it's interesting to think about whether that could be a reality in another 50 years, and whether it should be.

Sue Dibb

Thank you. Thank you to Laura for setting the scene there. I'm going to talk a bit more about the kinds of activities that are already underway. How do we go about creating this dietary transition? I'm going to talk about some of the campaigns and policy options, and some of the business activity that's aimed at promoting healthy and sustainable diets with less meat in them.

As Laura says, greenhouse gas emissions from livestock are equivalent to the emissions from our cars. So what is the first step here? I think the first step is we do have to start talking about this. Awareness is really low. As Laura said, there's a huge amount of disbelief when you start talking about the relationship between eating meat and climate change. Everybody knows about energy, everybody knows about transport. Some people talk about forests. But when you talk about cows and when you talk about cows burping, it's a joke to most people. That's quite an important barrier to overcome. But we know about how people take things into their belief systems. It is about hearing these messages, and hearing these messages from different sources as well.

I do think there's some real parallels here, this sort of resistance that we are aware of through our own research. We've done research too, to understand people's level of awareness and their openness to eating less meat. We have found some quite considerable differences. Young people – and I know this is a young people's event, and I'm really delighted to hear this – are much more open to eating less meat, and thinking about changes in levels of awareness among young people are high. There are also significant differences between men and women. For me, Jeremy Clarkson comes to mind when we talk about the idea that men might get out of their cars – and I know this isn't just about men and it's not about all men – the idea that you might not get your steak at the same time is a bit of a double whammy. That does create a bit of a knee-jerk reaction in some people to talking about eating less meat.

As Laura says, we really do have some strong cultural traditions. I wasn't aware of that quote, what Winston Churchill would have thought. But the idea of British beef is part of our culture, even though our habits have changed hugely and actually chicken is by far and away the most popular meat. But we have it in our unconscious that to be British is to eat beef. Of course, we do have a very powerful meat industry too.

So you could say, what politician in their right mind is going to stand up and be a champion for eating less meat? I would say: it may not be a vote winner, but I would add 'yet', and that's what I'm going to talk about, the change that we are creating.

Eating Better is a civil society alliance, now of 46 organizations that have come together. It's a broad alliance. That's what's quite unique. This isn't just bringing environmental organizations together, it's as much about recognizing it's a health issue. We have health organizations on board. It's also an animal rights issue as well, we have animal welfare organizations as part of the alliance. It's also about what's fair for feeding the world and so we've got international development organizations, faith groups. A very wide group of people, responsible business organizations also there.

What we've come together to do is to raise awareness of why we need to talk about this shift in diets. We've also come together to build support and lobbying muscle to say, actually, civil society organizations are coming at this with a shared message and a shared goal about shifting our diets onto not only healthy but also sustainable eating patterns. So we are wanting to work with and influence those who can make a difference, whether that's policymakers or those in business.

It's also about really trying to understand how you create the long-term cultural shifts. We've started to do research to really try and understand how to have this conversation with people. When we launched Eating Better, we didn't go in for a big mass public education campaign, in part because we didn't have the money, but actually because we didn't know how to have this conversation, because it's a new conversation to have. In the past it's been tricky and it's triggered knee-jerk reactions, so we do have to be quite thoughtful, we feel, about how we do this.

So we've come together to demonstrate that shifting diets to more plant-based eating with less and better meat is better for health, better for the environment and climate change and resource use, better for animal welfare, better for feeding the world fairly, better for sustainable livelihoods. It does provide business opportunities. It's a positive message, and positive messages, we feel, are important here. It's really many win-wins in that. You could say, what's not to like? What isn't on there is that you can also save money. So very positive there.

I would say we're talking about all meat – red, white and processed meats. Certainly if you look solely at climate change, it does look as if beef and lamb are the worst culprits, but actually when you look at the levels of consumption of chicken and pork, which we tend to eat in much greater quantities, there are animal welfare issues there. But those can't largely be fed on pasture, those are fed on soya and protein crops, and much of that is coming from South America – and that is what is helping to destroy the rainforests. So there's a bit of a convoluted whammy on climate change there. But we would say it's just as important. It's not just a question of shifting from red meat to white meat.

Where are people on this? Our research shows – I'll go through this quite quickly, because I think it's duplicating your research – low levels of awareness, but we have found people saying they're eating less meat, 20 per cent of people eating less meat. Over a third are already willing to consider eating less meat. We say that's a sizable chunk. People have called it the rise of the flexitarians. It's generating a whole new language. The synergies with health and animal welfare are important, we think, in engaging people on subjects that matter to them perhaps more than climate change – feels like a personal subject. Our report *Let's Talk about Meat* outlined ten ways in which we could start to have this conversation.

This is one of my favourite images that I like to use in all my presentations. This is from the Barilla Institute – the pasta people actually, based in Italy. Very nice image that shows that the foods that are good for the planet are also good for our health. You can see the fruit and vegetables – good for our health, less environmental impact. Meat and dairy products tend to be at the opposite end of that.

So what activities are there already? As I say, meat is the new sustainable food issue. Those of you who are engaged in thinking about sustainable food might think about, have I got to buy organic, have I got to buy local, have I got to buy seasonal, fair trade? I'm not saying they're not important, but if you want to have the biggest impact, it's eating less meat. So it's a new kid on the block, you could say, but rising very fast. There are some of the logos of some of the campaigns and initiatives that are underway. Ones coming up – we are in Meat-free May, a Friends of the Earth campaign. Coming up in June is World Meat-free Day, which we are a partner of. Sitting there talking to each other are the likes of chefs – Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall and Raymond Blanc, who are talking about this. Top chefs, it's becoming quite trendy to put vegetables centre plate.

I'll put the Chatham House report up there. One of my favourite headlines is the 'Eat Less Meat' one from the *Times*, which was earlier this year when DECC (Department of Energy and Climate Change) published a global calculator which showed the impacts of meat-eating and eating less meat. That was what the media really picked up on. It wasn't a toxic issue that day. So I really see that there is change happening here. There is awareness growing. These are all campaigns that are helping to do that.

We've launched our own Eating Better Challenge, which is our first toe in the water towards more public-facing messages. Five Tips for Eating Less and Better Meat. We're really just trying to demonstrate that the simple steps – you don't have to give up meat at all. We are trying to create a new space. You don't have to be vegan, you don't have to be vegetarian. It's not radical. It can also save you money.

But we know that it isn't just about individuals. If we're going to create the kind of systemic changes that are going to support people to eat less and better meat and more plant-based diets, then we do have to think about what are the policy levers. We've got a number of policy asks and we'll be putting those to whoever may be in power on Friday morning. I don't think we'll be quite knocking on the door on Friday morning because they might not have sorted themselves out by then, but top of our list is to integrate sustainability into our national dietary guidelines. I can talk more about some of these, as Antony is hurrying me on here.

Certainly, public sector food procurement – that's where government money goes, whether it's food in schools, food in hospitals, feeding the army. Shouldn't that money be supporting our climate change policies and our healthy eating policies? Then you start talking about reforming the CAP and policies toward ensuring that farming, better supports, sustainable consumption as well. I put a question mark against taxes. Something for us to think about, I don't think we're quite there yet. And food and agriculture and climate change targets, that's something that we've been talking with Chatham House more about, to understand how we could integrate this into those kinds of policies.

We are seeing food businesses picking up on this. IKEA recently announced that it's greening its meatballs across the world. We see top chefs. We've got a number of companies, particularly in the food service sector, who are really getting on board with this issue. We'll publish some research next week on sandwiches, just looking at the really poor options if you want to avoid meat and animal products in sandwiches, and calling on companies to offer better choices for people who want to go meat-free at lunchtime.

So there we go. I would like to say: be part of the change. There are things that you can do individually. Please take a look at our website, sign up for our newsletter. Follow us on Twitter, get in touch. Perhaps we can talk a bit more about some of the actions and activities. I'd be really interested to hear your views in the discussion in a moment. Thank you.

Tim Lang

You've heard from the previous two, from Laura and Sue, the evidence is pretty clear about this, and has been pretty clear for about 20 years. There is a real coherence to the picture about meat and climate change. Just to be clear about that. There are some fuzzy bits at the end, about sustainability of diets and the environment and health, mostly around fish, funnily enough. The problem is there is a clash between the public health evidence on fish – fish generally considered good nutritionally, but environmentally a huge problem.

But on meat, the picture is pretty clear – that is, if we are talking about westerners. There is a big bracket that has to be put around this debate in terms of the developing world. There are parts of the world where dietary options are fairly limited and the role of meat has a far greater nutritional significance and richness than it does here in Britain or in North America or northern Europe. But the picture that Laura and Sue have outlined – Laura is the Chatham House study's global look; *Eating Better* is UK-focused, rich country, alliance but very well networked internationally. The reason this matters, and the reason why it's a Chatham House issue, is because the drift of world food consumption is going towards more and more meat consumption. Even in India, a dominantly vegetarian culture, the consumption of not meat but of dairy is rocketing. India's cow herd is the fastest-growing and is already the biggest on the planet.

So the climate change implications of meat, and not even eating the meat, are absolutely consistent globally. But the politics of this is slightly different in different parts of the world. I'd rather get that absolutely out into the discussion.

But the coherence of the picture is now widely agreed. You will find in the scientific literature, the academic literature – both natural sciences and environmental sciences, particularly, and also public health and the social sciences – that there is now wide agreement. Whether your first concern is water consumption or you're interested in land use or you're interested in biodiversity, or you're interested in climate change, the thing that brings us together here, everything points to meat. You cannot resolve huge percentage of the drop that we need to get to stabilize a little and reduce climate change without addressing the issue that we have created animals to be our own competitors. Think of it in Darwinian terms and we have actually created something in ourselves where we are damaging our ecosystem, and we're now creating animals to double that damage. This is a really extraordinary situation. It makes debates like we have in Chatham House about nuclear power look quite small actually.

I have five points I want to make, one every 40 seconds probably. The first is, I'm a food policy man. I'm professor of food policy at City University up the road. I'm interested in the policy, the sort of world that Sue was talking about and Laura was hinting about, and Chatham House is engaged with, more at the international level. Why does it matter? Because this issue – although Sue is being very optimistic; I know her very well and I hope she won't be offended – she is giving a very positive gloss. Right now in the United States, the five-yearly review of the dietary guidelines for Americans is now happening. This is 2015, the new dietary guidelines are being created. The scientific evidence was presented in an enormous report, which you can get online. Absolutely clear: for the first time, the public health dietary guidelines included an environmental dimension. The scientists who put it together went the very soft route into introducing this. They said the American dietary guidelines must not just keep talking about protein, fats, etc. We've got to introduce this clear evidence that the environment is also affected just as much as public health is affected by what we eat. So let's start introducing dietary elements into it.

The report was handed over. One day later, the secretary of state for agriculture basically declared war on it, and said his grandson didn't need this, age five, because he could make up his own mind; his granddaughter was still having to colour in the dots and didn't understand how to make decisions. All hell then broke loose. This is supposedly neutral science. This is a highly sensitive issue. Sue was quite right in saying the consensus is there, but the reality is there are really strong elements of industrial opposition to this, almost entirely from what the Americans like to call 'big food'. Let us be very clear about that. In Europe we're slightly more civilized about this, but exactly the same arguments would happen.

So at what level of policymaking might we get the sort of changes that Sue wants, and I want too? Let me be very clear, I'm a supporter of Eating Better. Is it going to be at the national level? We're not quite sure we've even got a government, let alone whether something like this would be on the agenda of it, when it should be. There's a very interesting movement of cities at the moment that people like me see as very important. There's this sort of meso-level of where, here in Britain, we have 45 sustainable food cities, and it's growing. The world cities, the climate change C40 is actually now C71. Later this year in Milan, they're going to be signing an urban food policy pact, in which this language is going to be there. Cities are part of the identity politics that in that slightly messy world of politics, that matters. They are wanting to take a lead on this. I've just been in Copenhagen last week. The mayor of Copenhagen is wanting to get into this territory. Are cities going to be the sort of place where you get London having its own sustainable dietary guidelines? This is interesting. I personally think that's coming.

The second point is why I think that matters. I already said, it's partly because of identity politics, but partly because it's cities and towns which now represent the majority of civilization. We are now an urbanized world, yet the politics of food is still dominated by a rural assumption that goes from when Churchill gave the statement that Laura said, the 1930s. That is totally out of date. We have to actually completely update food governance. This is a Chatham House thing. I was working with Chatham House on this sort of thing 10 years ago. We still have not got that. The UN system is not addressing the international governance. We haven't got the right mechanisms for it. WHO and FAO; UNEP is slightly different, I think it's been much more – because it's a newer institution within the UN. We haven't yet got the right sort of leadership. Yet the FAO is the parent body that gave the only formal global definition of sustainable diets.

A third point. We know – the other two speakers have said – the problems are clear. We've got problems of identity. It's very personal but it's also highly political. It's about putting together things that people think they're making choices about. 'I like to choose my diet' – of course I don't choose my diet, the diet is from my own class basis, my social income, socioeconomic status. It's from status, it's from the point of time in which we're born, from our religion. Actually, we have far less choice when we're making our choices than we like to think.

When someone has a heart attack, then they usually start thinking about their diet. There are two moments when people really change their diet: they have babies or they have a heart attack. Then they think very seriously about their circumstances. But what we're talking about here, what is at stake is that the world is having a heart attack. That is called, in my world, the nutrition transition. The world is going through a nutrition transition at catastrophic speed. I was brought up in India. In India, the city I was brought up in (Bombay, now Mumbai) has the second-highest rate of Type II diabetes on the planet. It doesn't have the health care to deal with it. This is now a financial burden on the development process itself. It is absolutely central to the sorts of things that Chatham House should and is doing. So it's terrific that you're doing this.

A final point if I may, Antony. At the heart of this question, it seems to me – I'm going to be very philosophical – are tensions about what sort of food system we want. Cities can't feed themselves. They are parasitic (a bit like the British still thinking we've got an empire). We now expect other people to feed ourselves all the time. Britain started feeding itself about 80 per cent. Churchill was a rarity, he saw the difficulties in the war and indeed appointed the minister of food to get a grip on it, and did. In case you didn't know, the first illegal act of World War II was buying the entire Canadian wheat crop illegally, and it had to be retrofitted, because the message would have been that Britain was actually knackered. It was only producing 30 per cent of its own food.

So there is a very important political point for us, about what are we doing with our land. It's not just about feeding people, not just about public health. It's about our own eco-space. If you look globally, the eco-space available to people is huge in Brazil – 6 hectares per person. In India, 0.2. By 2030, the entire world's population will only have 0.25 hectares per person to feed itself. We cannot do that, even if you have synthetic meat, without altering the diet away from the sort of British diet or American diet.

I think change is inevitable. The politics will be about how we manage that change, or whether we walk into crisis and then we're doing Churchillian stuff. Can I tell my one Churchill thing? We're supposed to have a thought about Churchill. My favourite story about Churchill and food is this. When, reluctantly, he realized because of Rowntree, who in 1939 wrote the key report preparing for basically war – Rowntree advised, said we're going to set up a national feeding system of mass canteens to allow flexibility of labour and so on. Churchill was outraged and resisted, but in the end agreed it and said: if we've got to have this communistic nonsense of centralized feeding, we'd better call them British so it makes people think they're having something that's good. We'll call them restaurants because then they'll know they're having something really good. That's the origins of the British restaurant system, by the way. That's my Churchill story.

Antony Froggatt

Thank you. We've heard a number of views, which I hope have stimulated thoughts.