Food Democracy, Food Control and the Social Dimension of Modern Food Policy

Tim Lang
Centre for Food Policy, City University London, UK
e: t.lang@city.ac.uk

Green Templeton Lecture given on Monday, February 4, 2013 at the Tsuzuki Lecture Theatre, St Anne’s College, Oxford University
Introduction & overview (1)

- The food system is in trouble – in DCs and LDCs
  - For different reasons: over/mal/under-consuming
- C20th brought food advances but at a cost
- We now must clarify what we mean by progress:
  - What is a good food system?
  - How to get there in rich and poor worlds?
  - How to prevent spread of western diet-related diseases in developing countries?
  - How to lower food’s environmental footprint?
  - How to reinject a full social analysis into a policy world dominated by productionist policy thinking?
Overview (2)

• As evidence of systemic stress grows, food is strangely low priority in global/DC politics

• That Policy debate is divided doesn’t help:
  – Solutions being offered vary
  – Academics too locked in disciplines
  – Societal interest submerged in market/production

• This talk explores a matrix of tensions:
  – Technical versus Social approaches
  – Food Control versus Food Democracy
Where are we now?

• Where have we come from?
The 1940s aspiration:
Hot Springs Conference, 1943

@ Homestead Hotel, Hot Springs, Virginia USA - 18 May to 3 June 1943
http://www.fao.org/docrep/009/p4228e/P4228E04.htm

• Called by F D Roosevelt (US president)
• 44 ‘free’ countries agreed 4 goals:
  I. raise “nutrition and standards of living” of the people
  II. improve efficiency of “the production and distribution of all food and agricultural products
  III. Deliver “better condition of rural populations”
  IV. Contribute to “expanding world economy and ensuring humanity's freedom from hunger”
• Agreed to create FAO (happened Oct 16, 1945)
• 144 member states by 1979
So where has this got us?

• The food system is **still** in trouble!
• Over-producing (kcal) but mal-distributed + wasted
• C20th ‘efficiency’ brought health & enviro impacts:
  – Cheap food (DCs), resource use, NCDs, excess culture,
• HUGE challenges ahead:
  – CO2e, H2O, eco-systems, population, inequalities, urbanisation, nutrition transition (‘new fundamentals’)
• Evidence/policy/action gap is wide and complex
• ....so.....What can be done?
Sober analyses from many reports

- WHO/FAO (2011): diet and physical activity
- Global Burden of Disease (2012): NCDs spreading
- UN / FAO (2010): food insecurity ‘old style’
- UNEP (2009 & 2012): food & environment
- IAASTD (2008): small farmers
- World Bank (2008): Agriculture for Development / small farmers
- Scientific advisors’ national and global analyses:
  - PMSEIC Australia (2010)
  - INRA France (Paillard et al) (2010)
  - Foresight UK (2011)
- WEF (2011): business roadmap
- CCAFS Agriculture & Climate Change (2012): C02e and agri adaptation
- UN Special Rapporteur (De Schutter): social justice & distribution
- Etc, etc
The Hot Springs vision was the Productionist Paradigm Lang & Heasman (2004) *Food Wars*

Science + capital + distribution → output → less waste → cheaper food → health = progress

This is the default policy position still today
What’s wrong with this?

- Actually, production rose!
- But costs and externalities too!
- It cannot address the challenges ahead
What they didn’t know

• 1930s/40s science policy could not imagine
  – Over-consumption (consumers are irrational)
  – Environmental damage (planet can be ‘mined’)
  – Health complexities (Keys’ 7 Nations study, 1970)

• Why / how Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) now outweigh problems of under-consumption*
  – 1.4 bn overweight/obese** + 0.9bn hungry***
  – Higher life expectancy but more morbidity (= costs)

‘Modern’ supply chains spread new culture

(photo G Rayner - Tesco in Thailand)
Planetary Boundaries already exceeded?
Figure 2. Per capita food losses and waste, at consumption and pre-consumptions stages, in different regions

Source: Gustavsson et al FAO 2011
http://www.fao.org/docrep/014/mb060e/mb060e00.pdf
The economic picture has changed
FAO food price index 1990-2012 / OECD Agricultural Outlook 2012-21
Where did this go wrong? 1970s/80s?

- 1970s debate between productionism vs sustainable development was altered by (1) green revolution (2) neo-liberalism’s triumph
- Market emphasis side-lined the Brundtland triple focus: economy + environment + society
- Markets reduced this to supply/demand dynamics
- But supply chains were in process of massive change: supermarketisation + globalisation
- Language of markets favoured consumerism
In fact, social analysis comes and goes

- **1930s**: social analyses (emphasising need for distribution of wealth, improving access) led to UK WW2 rationing, welfare state & income focus

- **1970-80s**: Sustainable Development (Brundtland → Brandt) re-injected social analysis but for LDCs

- **1990s & 2000s**: neo-liberal restructuring (globalisation, market liberalis’n) WTO → Seattle

- **2000s** ‘sudden’ Obesity pandemic questions consumer behaviour - ‘wrong consumers’ thesis

- Then the **2007-08 price spike** threw all into air!
  - Bankers vs public interest; widening social inequalities
Where now for global policy thinking?

- Social dimension mostly associated with LDC FP
- DC FP wrapped around market approaches
- Social dimension weakened in DC sustainability
We see it in new (old) debates eg Action Now or Long-term Reform?

Act now

- **Examples**
  - GAIN; SUN

- **Methods:**
  - GM; biofortification; individual behaviour change (nudge); ads;

- **Rationale:**
  - Virtuous circle begins
  - Investment pays
  - Cash can be unlocked now
  - Prevention begins now not later

 Longer-term reform

- **Examples:**
  - CFS; Oxfam et al ‘If’

- **Methods:**
  - Social change; fiscal; cultural change; long-term education;

- **Rationale:**
  - Technical fixes don’t work
  - Ownership and power are concentrated
  - The problem is democracy
  - Prevention requires institutional reform
...and in these currently hot issues:

- **Public-private partnerships:**
  - Today: Responsibility Deals; company standards
  - WW1 injection of public → private dominated fd system (See: Beveridge (1928) *Food Control*. Oxford: Clarendon)

- **Tracking people’s food (Big Brother info):**
  - Today: DunnHumby for Tesco
  - 1930s: Mass Observation, Titmuss, Coop Womens Guild

- **Low income consumers:**
  - Today: JRF, Resolution, DeSchutter, Food Banks?!!! 1930s: hunger marches, M’Gonigle & BMA, Boyd Orr

- **Defining the ‘national interest’:**
  - today: markets
  - 1939: BoydOrr, LeGrosClark & Titmuss, *et al*
We can translate this as 2 clusters: Food Control / Food Democracy

**Food Control**
- Managerialist command
- Biofortification
- Sustainable intensification (technical version)
- Efficiency as productivity
- Business model in charge
- Value for money consumers
- Consumerism
- Sustainability as enviro’t
- Expertise in control
- Food security via Tesco et al

**Food Democracy**
- Co-operation & ‘bottom-up’
- Shared wealth /raised income
- Sustainability as social development
- Ecological maintenance
- Redefine business model
- Values for money
- Citizenship
- Sustainability as complexity
- Social resilience & skills
- Food security as sustainability
...and seen through Ecological Public Health / Food Policy lens


• Public health is the *shaping of conditions for health*
• Reality is a mismatch of bodies and environment
  – under/over/mal-consumption + Nutrition Transition
• ‘Modern’ food systems have changed food cultures and aspirations: 24 hr snacking/shopping
• But....a policy battle goals is emerging:
  – more food or sustainable diets?
  – a societally engaged ‘sustainability’ or return to b-a-u
Re-invigorating Food Democracy (FD)

• FD reduced to consumerism, choice culture, low prices = Democratic Transition faltering? Rayner & Lang 2012

• Broader ambition requires societal element
  – The process of achieving entitlement (Sen);
  – operationalising ‘Right to Food’ (De Schutter)

• Food as ‘locus of democratic advance’ for all:
  – participation; accountability of institutions; ie, more than pursuit of 3 As: access, availability, affordability
Meanwhile, back in the real world....

- Companies in control are uneasy
  - Long-term worries
- EU as tortoise to TNC hares?
Some big Food Companies engage + sustainability, but ‘lite’? self-interest?

• Cooperative Group (1994) ethical drive/fairtrade
• Unilever: MSC (1990s) / Sust’ble Living Plan (2010)
• Wal-Mart: Hurricane Katrina (2007) → Asda
• Marks & Spencer: Plan A (2007)
• PepsiCo: 50-in-5 commitments (2010)
• Barilla: double pyramid (2010)
• Nestle: 60/40+ (2010)
• but can individual companies resolve world food systems’ problems? This is a governance issue!
Is ‘choice editing’ the key? (I think not)

• Companies’ version of sustainability is internal to own supply chains: not total diet/food system
• Big investment are locked into unsustainable systems eg logistics (trucking, motorways, global)
• Need for common framework / level playing field
• This needs
  – Government as facilitator
  – Democratic accountability, auditing, engagement
• “We can use ‘choice-editing’ for a short time (10 yrs) but in the end it needs big consumer change” (Giant retailer)
Meanwhile the EU stirs: some sustainable Food developments, 2008-12

- **Sustainable Consumption-Production & Sustainable Industrial Policy Action Plan (2008)**
- Suitability of the potential extension of the *Ecolabel to food* products
- **European Food Sustainable Consumption Production (SCP) Roundtable** (2009-) co-chairs DG Environment & European Food & Feed Trade Associations. Based in FoodDrinkEurope & supported by JRC.
## Sustainable food consumption and production – emerging Govt policy advice in Europe (North), 2006ff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UK 2006</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) &amp; National Consumer Council</td>
<td>Sustainable Consumption “I will if you will” – generic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany 1990s (2008)</td>
<td>German Council for Sustainable Development</td>
<td>Sustainable Shopping Basket: includes food – lists labels and schemes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU 2008</td>
<td>Sustainable Consumption-Production &amp; Sustainable Industrial Policy Action Plan</td>
<td>Voluntary initiatives – but little food focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands 2009</td>
<td>LNV Ministry – Policy outline for achieving Sustainable Food</td>
<td>Sustainable food production &amp; consumer educ. campaigns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden 2009</td>
<td>National Food Administration (&amp; Swedish EPA) – notification to EU (withdrawn 2011)</td>
<td>Environmentally friendly food choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK 2009</td>
<td>SDC, Council of Food Policy Advisors → Dept Environment Food Rural Affairs (Defra)</td>
<td>Recommend defining low impact (sustainable) healthy diet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Major public policy choices are upon us

- The elephant in the room is us, the people.
- What sort of food system do we want?
- Getting a grip of drifting and fragmented FP institutions
2 realities: Over- vs Under-consumption worlds

Over-consuming world

• Cheap food
• Packaged and pre-processed food culture
• Waste mostly post consumer purchase
• Hidden environmental impact
• Infrastructure very capital efficient
• Retailers get most money
• Health problems: over/mal-consumption

Under-consuming world

• Expensive food as % outlay
• Staple food and domestic cooked food culture
• Waste mostly on/near farm eg poor storage
• Overt environmental impact
• Infrastructure underperforming
• Traders get most money?
• Health problems: under/mal-consumption
Goals for C 21st policy processes: if there was a Hot Springs 2 now....

• The Goals
  • Sustainable Diets from Sustainable Food Systems
  • Narrow the Evidence-Policy gap
  • Reshape consumer aspirations around sustainable diets
  • New frameworks for whole chain sustainability

• This requires:
  • Integrated food chain analysis:
    o Agri-food-health-environment- society-economy etc
  • Rationalisation of initiatives (end policy cacophony)
  • Stop being frightened of consumers
    o World cannot eat like the West; nor should it!
What would food systems look like if built for health and eco-systems?

• **Contract & converge** *(Royal Society 2012 People & Planet report):*
  – Rich societies cut and Poor societies eat more
  – All restructured around low impact diets

• **Rebalanced financial flows** *(growers get too little):*
  – UK (agric 8%, manuf 28%, retail 29%, catering 25%)
  – Shift incentives (biofuels, commodities, ecosystems)

• **More focus on horticulture within ‘nutrition-sensitive agriculture’:**
  – Biodiversity in field and to the stomach *(FAO&Bioversity 2012)*
  – 2x Fruit & Veg = 180k jobs in USA *(UCS 2012)*
More refined notion food sustainability: UK Sustainable Development Commission proposal (2011)

http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications.php?id=1187

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Social values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Taste</td>
<td>• Pleasure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Seasonality</td>
<td>• Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cosmetic</td>
<td>• Animal welfare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fresh (where appropriate)</td>
<td>• Equality &amp; justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Authenticity</td>
<td>• Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Skills (citizenship)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environment</th>
<th>Health</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Climate change</td>
<td>• Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Energy use</td>
<td>• Nutrition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Water</td>
<td>• Equal access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Land use</td>
<td>• Availability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Soil</td>
<td>• Social status/ affordability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Biodiversity</td>
<td>• Information &amp; education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Waste reduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economy</th>
<th>Governance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Food security &amp; resilience</td>
<td>• Science &amp; technology evidence base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Affordability (price)</td>
<td>• Transparency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Efficiency</td>
<td>• Democratic accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• True competition &amp; fair returns</td>
<td>• Ethical values (fairness)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Jobs &amp; decent working conditions</td>
<td>• International aid &amp; development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fully internalised costs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sustainable Diets are those diets with low environmental impacts which contribute to food and nutrition security and to healthy life for present and future generations. Sustainable diets are protective and respectful of biodiversity and ecosystems, culturally acceptable, accessible, economically fair and affordable; nutritionally adequate, safe and healthy; while optimizing natural and human resources’.
Barilla Centre: combining nutrition with environment gains

Towards a new agenda?

• Ask ‘what is farming for?’
  – (1) sustainable diets (2) eco-system services (3) employment
  – New dietary guidelines – international & national

• Ecological public health requires re-engineering of the food system:
  – Roadmaps; frameworks; low energy infrastructure

• Prices: from ‘value-for-money’ to values for money
  – Use rising energy prices to get more €$/£ to growers

• Consumer behaviour change:
  – contract & converge; ‘citizenship’ not consumerism
## Different versions of Progress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dominant policy position</th>
<th>Radical policy position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Commodity output</td>
<td>• Low impact food output</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Specialisation</td>
<td>• Multifunctionality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Export agribusiness</td>
<td>• Sustainable food business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Private leadership in PPPs</td>
<td>• Public institutional lead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Globalised markets</td>
<td>• Localised markets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Productivity defined financially</td>
<td>• Productivity defined as ecological production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Western modernisation</td>
<td>• Ecological modernisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Contribute to high value-adding</td>
<td>• Maximise value for real food at grower end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Consumerism</td>
<td>• Citizenship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Debate now bubbling

• Sustainable intensification:
  – Is this benign or still too focussed on production?
• Food waste:
  – Progress merely changed where and how we waste
• How to tackle **Western modes of consumption**:
  – Big battles here: Mayor Bloomberg on soft drinks
• **Eco-systems** are more than climate change:
  – What would a diet good for biodiversity look like?
• **Economic concentration:**
  – who makes the money? Who wins/loses?
• **Runaway Health and healthcare costs**.... And more
What might achieve a ‘radical but reasonable’ future?

• Reasoned action?
• Events / shocks?
• Democratic pressures?
Upsurge of Food Democratic experimentalism

- Urban agriculture
- City Food movement
- Low carbon diets
- 100 mile Vancouver/Fife
- Animal welfare-health connection
- Biodiversity horticulture
- FAO & Bioversity (CGIAR)
- Childrens food mov’t
- Sustainable diet policies
- Smallholder co-operatives (LDCs)
- Anti-supermarket mov’t
- Corporate PR scepticism
- EU processes (some)
- Consumer mov’t (CI) now pro Food Citizenship
Stormclouds / pressure points

• World Food insecurity pressures
  – Commodity trade; speculation (see: UNCTAD 2012);
  – Price volatility (OECD 2012)
• Internal systems ‘boiling-over’: (Tipping Points bk, OUP 2013)
  – 2006-08 food price spike
  – Climate change kicks in faster than politicians expect
  – Oil prices (→ biofuel commitments)
  – Land grabs (→ UN Special Rapporteur report)
  – Global Obesity rates (→ WHA 2003 + CSR ie not much)
• Potential ‘boil-dry’ moments:
  – Prices? → social unrest
  – Water? → crop shortage
  – Migration? → labour
  – Geo-political turmoil? → food wars
Summary: we must face the range and scale of our problems ahead

- **We need a new ‘Hot Springs 2’ around...:**
  - Sustainable diets: new international guidelines
  - Integration of food for human and eco-systems health, ie ‘ecological public health’
  - Re-engineer food systems around broad version of sustainability (6 core value sets)
  - Consumer culture change: contract & converge

- **We need to unblock the politics, arguing:**
  - Organised change is better than enforced change
  - Self-interest coincides with eco-systems health
  - Embryonic shifts are underway already
Research needs for policy

• Better integrated food systems analyses
• Modelling total food systems
• Better involvement of social sciences (natural sciences verge on neo-Malthusianism!)
• Better scenarii and options
• Data summaries for policy-makers beyond productionism
• Studies of impact on macro-economy if food prices rise in developed economies (ie the rich)
What do I personally want (3 mins with the PM):

• Rebuild UK food security /focus on horticulture:
  – How to get plant diversity into fields and stomachs

• Priority for labour and low income
  – Dignified labour needs good wages

• Sustainable dietary guidelines:
  – Fish yes/no? We need an Intergovernmental Panel on Sustainable Diets (IPSD)
Thank you! t.lang@city.ac.uk