

# Food and farming



**Friends of  
the Earth**



# Food matters

Wherever you live and whatever you earn, food is essential for life. But what we eat, how it is produced and where we buy it are complicated issues in 21st century Britain.

Today very few of us are involved in growing our own food or raising animals, and we buy over 75 per cent of our food from supermarkets. But we worry, more than ever, about the safety of the food we buy and the possible toxins we and our children might be eating.

Farming is now in crisis, and many rural communities are declining. Many smaller farmers, forced to produce at the lowest possible cost because of pressure from supermarkets, can no longer make a living from growing food. Cheap food is imported from hundreds or even thousands of miles away, burning up fuel which is adding to dangerous climate change.

Intensive farming in this country continues to damage the environment and put profit above people, wildlife and animal welfare. And the global system for governing food policy is making the corporations rich while farmers in developing countries can no longer afford to feed their families.

That's why Friends of the Earth is campaigning for sustainable and equitable food production for everyone.

**We can provide high quality food without trashing the environment and threatening our wildlife. This booklet shows how sustainable ways of farming can provide a decent living for farmers and give us safe, nutritious food, at a price we can afford.**

Did you know



**In 1939 there were half a million farms in the UK employing 15 per cent of the population. In 2000 only two per cent of the population still worked in agriculture.**

**In 2002 the Environment Agency estimated that intensive farming costs the country £500 million each year because of water pollution, soil erosion and resulting flood damage.**

**The average distance food has travelled from field to plate (food miles) has doubled in the past 20 years.**

**On average, only 10 pence in every pound spent in a supermarket goes to the person who actually grew the food.**

Calliste Lelliott/Friends of the Earth



# What's in your shopping bag?

## Fruit and Vegetables

Many, especially those that are out of season, are imported from thousands of miles away by aircraft, burning fuel and adding to climate change. Over 50 per cent may also have pesticide residues in them. Yet we could support sustainable farming by buying local and organic food.

## Chicken

Almost all poultry in the UK are raised in cramped, unhealthy conditions. If we ate a smaller quantity of high-quality, free-range meat, it would improve animal welfare, save resources, reduce pollution and create farm jobs.

## Water

Roughly 1.5 million tonnes of plastic are used every year by the bottled water industry, creating serious waste problems. Tap water costs about 1000 times less than bottled water, and in most EU countries, including the UK, is actually as good as bottled water.

## Bread

New GM labelling regulations allow up to 0.9 per cent of soya flour used in bread to be GM and unlabelled. Supermarkets need to give consumers what they want – GM-free food.

## Processed food

Highly processed food typically contains high levels of salt, sugar and fats. Excessive consumption is adding to obesity problems for people in the UK. The National Audit Office says the cost of obesity is £2.5 billion a year.

## Chocolate

Most cocoa beans used to make chocolate are harvested in Africa where rich countries control the price paid to farmers which is far too low for a decent standard of living. But we could support those farmers by buying chocolate that carries the Fair Trade label. However, chocolate companies should guarantee fair prices to all growers.



# Farming in crisis

Over the past 50 years farming has become highly mechanised, dependent on agro-chemicals and very wasteful in its energy use. Such intensive farming creates widespread environmental and health problems.

Pesticides, fertilisers and animal waste pollute our land and water supplies, while destroying and degrading wildlife habitats. Added to this, the food health scares and animal diseases of the past 20 years – e-coli, salmonella, BSE and foot and mouth – are all symptoms of an ailing system which is not sustainable, economically or environmentally.

Intensive farming also receives vast subsidies. Sustainable farming methods and environmental schemes on farms receive far less financial support. And farmers are at the mercy of governments, big businesses and international trade agreements which view farming as a business like any other. The low-cost approach forced on farmers by this system means many simply cannot make a living from growing food.

Supermarkets sell us three-quarters of our food. They have been forcing down prices paid to farmers for years, and can force farmers to sell at or below the cost of production. Their enormous influence over the food business also makes it harder for small shops and small-scale producers to survive.

**Intensive farming methods are the product of Government farming policies of the past 50 years. We need a new system that supports farmers who protect wildlife and gives them a fair price for the food they produce. The best way to do this is to support sustainable farming (like organic farming) and localised food production.**

Did you know



**18,000 jobs in agriculture were lost in 2002 and many small farms went out of business. Some 65,000 people left farming in the six years up to 2002.**

**In 2000, 80 per cent of Government subsidies went to intensive production, and only eight per cent went to schemes encouraging farmers to improve the environmental value of the farm.**

**Under intensive farming 98 per cent of our wildflower meadows have disappeared, numbers of farmland birds have declined dramatically and our ancient woodlands have been reduced to a fraction of what existed before the war.**

Tony Juniper/Friends of the Earth



**Barren land: this giant field, heavily sprayed with chemicals and with the hedges ripped out, supports little or no wildlife. Local, small-scale, sustainable farming doesn't destroy the diversity of wild plants and animals found in our countryside.**



# Food safety

## Genetic modification (GM)

There are natural barriers to stop unrelated species breeding with each other, but advances in biotechnology mean that scientists can now move genetic material from one species to another. But scientists still don't know the full effects of growing GM plants out in the field, where they can cross-pollinate with wild plants and neighbouring crops. They don't know whether introduced genes can cause long-term health effects once they are in the food chain. And they don't know whether genes from crops modified to tolerate weedkillers could transfer into other plants, leading to the development of 'super weeds', resistant to weedkillers.

## Pesticides

A healthy diet must include fresh fruit and vegetables but Government figures show that half of those sold in supermarkets contain pesticide residues. And we still don't know what the long-term health effects of ingesting a cocktail of pesticide residues are. But we know that the effects on wildlife and the environment can be devastating.

**GM technology and pesticides enable intensive agriculture to dominate farming. But sustainable agriculture, locally produced, can provide us with enough to eat, safeguard our wildlife and protect human health.**

Did you know



**Studies in agricultural communities around the world have found links between pesticide exposure and health effects in children, including birth defects.**

**A poll in 2001 showed that 70 per cent of Europeans do not want to eat GM food.**

**In 2000 the UK Government spent 30 per cent of its food research budget on biotechnology and GM but only eight per cent on organic farming.**

**Genetic engineers can put novel genes into any crop. For example, in the laboratory fish genes were put into sweetcorn to make it frost-resistant.**



**Skin deep: one reason why farmers use so many pesticides is the supermarkets' demand for perfect-looking fruit and vegetables. Between 1998 and 2003, 47 per cent of supermarket apples tested contained pesticide residues, and some other fruit contained a cocktail of pesticides above legal and safety limits.**



# Sustainable farming

Sustainable farming uses non-polluting methods as close as possible to those found in nature. Soil fertility is improved using manure and compost. Artificial fertilisers, pesticides, antibiotics, hormones and GM ingredients are avoided. Reliance on fossil fuels is reduced by cutting out man-made chemicals and reducing food miles. Food production, processing and distribution are carried out as close together as they can be.

## Wildlife and conservation

Sustainable farming methods naturally support nature conservation, and reverse the trends in intensive farming which have caused populations of wildlife to decline. Biodiversity (the range and number of wild plants and animals) can be much higher on sustainable farms than intensive farms.

## Pesticides

Intensive farmers have 446 artificial pesticides to choose from and they rely on chemical control. Sustainable farming finds ways to avoid using artificial pesticides, such as running mixed farms and encouraging natural predators like ladybirds to keep pest numbers down.

## Animal welfare

The production of free-range meat on sustainable farms gives animal welfare high priority. Animals have the space to live in social groups, while GM feed is banned and the use of antibiotics is restricted.

**Sustainable, local agriculture is the best way to produce safe, nutritious food which safeguards human health, protects the environment and creates jobs.**

Did you know



**Studies have shown that when an out-of-town supermarket opens, more local jobs are lost than created and many local shops close down.**

**If intensive farmers had to pay the costs of cleaning up the environment from pesticides and fertilisers, the price we pay for their food would be higher.**

**Organic farms in lowland areas support 40 per cent more birds, double the number of butterflies and 500 per cent more plant species than intensive farms.**

Chris Knights/rspb-images.com



**On your farm: more sustainable farming means more jobs in rural areas where unemployment can be high.**



# What you can do

We can all make choices about what we eat and what we buy that will make a difference.

## Buy organic food

Organic farming is one example of sustainable farming. Organic certification means food is produced according to strict rules which have benefits for the environment, our health and animal welfare. Organic food should be free of pesticide residues, antibiotics, hormones or GM ingredients. For these reasons, and if you can afford it, buy organic food. But because 70 per cent of the organic food available is imported it's also worth looking out for local food initiatives.

## Buy local food

Eating locally-produced, fresh, seasonal food is good for us and good for the environment. Cutting the number of miles your food has travelled and avoiding packaging reduces pollution and waste. Revitalising local food economies by supporting local producers is the best way to get fresh,



**In 2001 there were 2,500 certified organic producers in the UK, and in 2003 there were 4,100.**

**In March 2002 a survey found that food sold at farmers' markets in the South West was on average 35 per cent cheaper than food of similar quality in supermarkets in the same towns.**

**In the middle of the UK apple season in 2003 a Friends of the Earth survey found that the majority of apples stocked by Asda and Tesco were imported.**



Nick Cobbing/Friends of the Earth

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healthy food to people on low incomes, and it helps neighbourhood regeneration. If the supermarket is your only option, ask it to stock more locally-produced and more organic foods.

### **Buy direct from the farmer**

Direct links between you and the producer mean the farmer gets a better profit and you can have more confidence that what you buy is produced sustainably. Farmers' markets and farm shops also boost the local rural economy and benefit local farmers. You may be lucky enough to have these nearby, or you can use a delivery scheme which supplies local fruit and vegetables direct to your door (which also cuts packaging waste). See the Food Directory on page 15 for more ideas.

### **Grow your own**

If you have a garden or an allotment, growing food is one of the best ways to guarantee yourself fresh, chemical-free food without clocking up any food miles. Making and using your own compost will cut waste, improve your soil and feed your plants.

### **Avoid GM foods**

Consumers have overwhelmingly rejected GM foods, and supermarkets no longer stock them. From April 2002 all ingredients with a GM content above 0.9 per cent have to be labelled. Some unlabelled foods could contain small amounts of GM and a few products will be labelled – look out for the labelling. Avoid these as much as you can and buy fresh fruit and vegetables and organic foods which are GM-free.



Nicola Swinburne

**1** Box delivery schemes for fruit and vegetables are now one of the fastest growing ways of getting food straight from the farmer to the consumer.

**2** There are now 235 farmers' markets across the UK.

**3** In the UK around 300,000 people keep allotments.

## Buy fair trade products

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) makes the rules about 'free trade' in agriculture and means richer countries can control world prices and keep much of the profits for themselves. 'Free trade' for multinational companies means global markets are opened up for their products. 'Free trade' rules for smaller farmers in the developing world and in Britain mean they struggle to make a profit.

Unless we buy fairly-traded goods, we are supporting the 'middle man' – the importer, the food processing company or the supermarket supplier – not the farmer. Buying fairly-traded products, such as coffee, tea, cocoa, honey and bananas, puts money back into local communities to give everyone a better standard of life. Farmers are guaranteed a fair price for their products, enabling them to feed and educate their families.



Did you know

### **Aren't GM crops the way to feed the world?**

**There are more than 800 million people in the world who don't have enough to eat. But according to aid agencies the problem is poverty, not food shortages. Intensive farming, GM or not, destroys soil fertility. Small-scale farmers need help to grow food in sustainable and less intensive ways, to maintain crop diversity and feed their families at low cost. This is the way to ensure everyone has enough to eat.**

**In Haiti, most coffee farmers are small-holders. Café Direct pays them more than twice the usual rate for their coffee. These fair trade prices have funded a school, a football pitch, a meeting room and several houses for one co-op on the island.**

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## Your children's food

Children are more susceptible to toxic effects because their bodies are still growing. Because of this, pesticide residues in processed baby food are now banned. But residues remain in fruit and vegetables – and children should be eating these for their health. Buy organic food for your children when you can. Let your supermarket know you don't want pesticide residues in your food.

## Organic versus local

Most of the organic food sold in supermarkets is imported, some from the other side of the world. It doesn't make sense to damage the environment by using large quantities of fuel to import organic food when we could grow it locally.

Write to your supermarket asking for policies to support local producers. In the meantime, find local alternatives if you can. Keep yourself informed about food issues and weigh up the arguments.

**1** Look for the Fairtrade symbol for a range of delicious foods that are also produced by more environmentally-friendly farming methods.

**2** Fairly-traded products guarantee better trading and working conditions for small-holders in developing countries.

**3** Many primary schools are promoting healthy school meals with lots of fruit and vegetables.

**4** Helen Browning's mixed organic farm in Wiltshire has been highly successful.



The Fairtrade Foundation



Nick Cobbing/Friends of the Earth



Jennifer Bates/Friends of the Earth

# Friends of the Earth's Real Food Campaign

## Here's how we are working towards a truly sustainable future

Friends of the Earth has a vision for a new future for food and farming. We want to see a fair deal for farmers and consumers. We want the Government to act so that farmers are able to manage the countryside sustainably and provide high-quality food for a fair income.

### **Environment**

We want investment in sustainable agriculture like organic farming, so that the environment is protected and wildlife in our countryside can flourish.

### **Rural communities**

We want regeneration in rural communities, with more farming jobs in less-intensive production, better public transport in rural areas, more local food sold locally in farmers' markets or local shops, and a fair income for farmers who farm sustainably.

### **Food safety**

Pesticide residues should be eliminated from our food. All GM ingredients in food and animal products should be labelled if they are detectable. No further GM trials or commercial planting should be allowed until laws to prevent contamination and place strict liability for all harm arising on the biotech companies are in force.

### **Organic targets**

Friends of the Earth is calling for more support for local organic food initiatives, to make organic food more accessible to more people. Safe, nutritious, healthy food should be available to all.



**Contact Friends of the Earth for more information about our Real Food Campaign and how to join us.** Full campaign information, briefings and reports are on our website.

Information Service Freephone:  
0800 800 1111  
Email: [info@foe.co.uk](mailto:info@foe.co.uk)  
[www.foe.co.uk/campaigns/real\\_food/](http://www.foe.co.uk/campaigns/real_food/)

# Food directory

## **Centre for Alternative Technology**

Advice on organic gardening and sustainable living.  
[www.cat.org.uk](http://www.cat.org.uk)  
Tel: 01654 705950

## **Compassion in World Farming**

Working to improve farm animal welfare.  
[www.ciwf.co.uk](http://www.ciwf.co.uk)  
Tel: 01730 264208

## **Council for the Protection of Rural England**

Agri-environment schemes, rural planning issues and rural regeneration.  
[www.cpre.org.uk](http://www.cpre.org.uk)  
Tel: 020 7976 6433

## **DEFRA**

Government department covering agriculture and the environment.  
[www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk)  
Tel: 08459 33 55 77

## **Fairtrade Foundation**

Working directly with producers to promote fair trade practices.  
[www.fairtrade.org.uk](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk)  
Tel: 020 7405 5942

## **Five Year Freeze**

Alliance of 125 organisations opposing GM crops and imports.  
[www.fiveyearfreeze.org](http://www.fiveyearfreeze.org)  
Tel: 020 7837 0642

## **Food Standards Agency**

Official government advice on food safety.  
[www.foodstandards.gov.uk](http://www.foodstandards.gov.uk)  
Tel: 020 7276 8000

## **Foundation for Local Food Initiatives**

Advice on sustainable local food economies.  
[www.localfood.org.uk](http://www.localfood.org.uk)  
Tel: 0845 458 9525

## **Henry Doubleday Research Association**

Organic gardening, horticulture and composting.  
[www.hdra.org.uk](http://www.hdra.org.uk)  
Tel: 024 7630 3517

## **National Association of Farmers' Markets**

How to set one up and where your nearest one is.  
[www.farmersmarkets.net](http://www.farmersmarkets.net)  
Tel: 01225 787914

## **National Society of Allotments**

Advice on allotments and community schemes.  
[www.nsalg.demon.co.uk](http://www.nsalg.demon.co.uk)  
Tel: 01536 266576

## **Permaculture Association**

Sustainable living, small-holding and community-supported agriculture.  
[www.permaculture.org.uk](http://www.permaculture.org.uk)  
Tel: 0845 4581805

## **Pesticides Action Network**

Toxic effects of pesticides and the alternatives.  
[www.pan-uk.org](http://www.pan-uk.org)  
Tel: 020 7274 8895

## **Soil Association**

Box delivery schemes and organic certification.  
[www.soilassociation.org](http://www.soilassociation.org)  
Tel: 0117 929 0661

## **Sustain**

Alliance for better food and farming.  
[www.sustainweb.org](http://www.sustainweb.org)  
Tel: 020 7837 1228

## **Wholesome Food Association**

Working with smallholders/farmers to supply sustainably-grown produce to local outlets.  
[www.wholesomefood.org](http://www.wholesomefood.org)  
Tel: 01803 840427

## **WWOOF**

Get practical experience by volunteering on an organic farm.  
PO Box 2675, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 1RB  
[www.wwooof.org](http://www.wwooof.org)

# **Friends of the Earth inspires solutions to environmental problems, which make life better for people**

## **Friends of the Earth is:**

- the UK's most influential national environmental campaigning organisation**
- the most extensive environmental network in the world, with almost one million supporters across five continents and over 60 national organisations worldwide**
- a unique network of campaigning local groups, working in over 200 communities throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland**
- dependent on individuals for over 90 per cent of its income.**

### **Friends of the Earth**

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