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WHERE DOES YOUR FOOD COME FROM?

An article looking at changing demand for food in the UK and the impacts of importing our food.

Food supply and consumption in the UK has changed incredibly since World War 2. The UK's population has risen, the large supermarkets have grown, and diets have changed. Prior to WW2, much of the food consumed in the UK would have been home grown and seasonal with some exotic exceptions. Fruit and vegetables would have been grown and sold according to the seasons, with products like strawberries only available in summer and winter vegetables like Brussels Sprouts later in the year.

By 2037 the population of the UK is expected to rise to 73 million (from 64 million in 2015). This will increase the future demand for food. Despite the UK's efficient and productive farming sector the UK is not self-sufficient for food supplies like it once was. In fact the UK imports about 40 per cent of the total food consumed and this proportion is increasing. Why is this? We now live in a modern world where people expect to have access to any type of food, they want all year round; this results in the UK importing seasonal foods from other countries, for example strawberries and apples. This also links to the fact that the UK climate is unsuitable for some of our most enjoyed foods, such as tea and

bananas, we therefore import them. In modern times we also have supermarkets that are all in competition with each other to offer the lowest price to their customers. As a result of this we import cheaper food from abroad.

However, our constant need for a wide variety of food comes at a cost to both us and the environment. The biggest issue are food miles; these are a basic way of showing how far our food travels to get to us. The increase in food miles poses significant problems to the environment because of the energy required to transport the food. Importing our food and increasing food miles adds to our carbon footprint – the emission of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. This comes from producing the energy for commercial cultivation, and from transport by planes and lorries.



Many are also surprised to learn there is another price to pay: despite the appearance of near perfection in imported fresh fruit and vegetables, new research has found that the further they have travelled, the more their vitamin and mineral content deteriorates. Local or sometimes frozen food are more likely to have preserved their goodness.

We cannot continue at this unsustainable rate of sourcing our food, so what can you do? First, we can all try to shop more locally by visiting local farmers markets or butchers so that we know what we are buying has come from the local area. Another simple change is by eating seasonally, this means that we only eat foods that are in season in the UK at that time of year, so we are not importing food from other countries. Organic food is another growing demand in the UK which has both environmental and social benefits. Organic produce tends to be locally grown and does not involve any chemicals from the pesticides. This is not only better for the surrounding environment, habitats and air quality but also for people who are consuming naturally grown food which have more nutrients.

3 What are food miles? Why do we have them?

4 What is a carbon footprint? Why is this increasing?

6 List 3 ways we can reduce food miles

5 What social problem is caused by importing our food and using air freights?
