

House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee: Sustainable Food Inquiry**Response by the Wellcome Trust**

March 2011

Introduction

1. The relationship between food security and climate change is complex and an increasing priority on the global agenda. Interdisciplinary research will be needed to inform and develop appropriate and effective solutions for the production of healthy and sustainable food. As a research funder dedicated to improving human and animal health, the Wellcome Trust has a growing interest in this area and our 2010-2020 Strategic Plan identified 'Connecting Environment, Nutrition and Health' as one of five key challenges for the Trust. We will be developing our strategy in this area further over the coming years and we are pleased to have the opportunity to respond to this inquiry.
2. Food systems are global and while we appreciate that the focus of the inquiry is on sustainable food in the UK, it is important that the wider, international impacts of food policies are properly considered.

How can the environmental and climate change impacts of the food we choose to eat best be reduced?

3. There is an important synergy between diets that are both healthy and sustainable. A major international study, funded by the Trust, has demonstrated that certain policies for climate change mitigation can have positive impacts on health in both developed and low and middle income countries.¹ This modelling showed that a 30 per cent reduction in livestock production could make an important contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and an equivalent reduction in meat consumption in the UK may lead to health benefits across the population, for example a reduction in heart disease. It is important that evidence such as this is used to assess the full range of potential impacts of policies, particularly where these impacts span more than one sector or government department, such as health and climate change.

How can the government help deliver healthy food sustainability, whilst also delivering affordable food for all? How can consumers best be helped to make sustainable choices about food?

4. Adequate nutrition is an essential component of any sustainable diet and we are pleased that the Environmental Audit Committee has recognised this by including a reference to 'healthy food' in the call for evidence.
5. In general, research into the efficacy of different interventions or policies is important to ensure that effective and appropriate strategies are adopted. An example of where this is likely to be particularly important is in behaviour change, since changes in consumer behaviour will be necessary in order for society to adopt healthier, sustainable diets.

¹ <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/About-us/Policy/Spotlight-issues/Health-impacts-of-climate-change/Public-health-benefits-of-reducing-emissions/index.htm>

6. The food and drink industry has an important impact on consumers' food choice. A range of approaches can be used to influence the food and beverage industry, from regulation to incentive and disincentive structures. The Trust is currently supporting the development of the Access to Nutrition Index (ATNI),² which will rate companies' performance in providing nutritious products to consumers. The ATNI aims to encourage the food industry to adopt best practices in relation to nutrition and is based on the 'Access to Medicines Index' model,³ which was designed to produce sustainable changes in practices in the pharmaceutical industry.
7. Providing consumers with the information they need to make healthy and sustainable choices is another way to promote change. Further research is likely to be needed to build on work to define a sustainable, healthy diet. Examples of recent work in this area include the *Livewell* plate created by the WWF⁴ and the Food Standard Agency's work towards incorporating sustainability into the UK *Eatwell Plate*.⁵

The Wellcome Trust is a global charitable foundation dedicated to achieving extraordinary improvements in human and animal health. We support the brightest minds in biomedical research and the medical humanities. Our breadth of support includes public engagement, education and the application of research to improve health. We are independent of both political and commercial interests.

² <http://www.accesstonutrition.org/>

³ <http://www.accesstomedicineindex.org/>

⁴ http://assets.wwf.org.uk/downloads/livewell_report_corrected.pdf

⁵ <http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/updated20092011sdactionplan.pdf>