Food Production, Provision and Attitudes

Globally, food production systems account for around 25% of emissions, with half of that from livestock production. Changing what we eat and how it is produced will help achieve our zero-carbon target. Eating more locally grown food, fruit, vegetables, grains and pulses, and less meat, will also benefit our health, our economy and our countryside.

Despite this the council’s sustainability strategy makes no mention of food.

Councils should be taking initiatives including ensuring that all schools, hospitals, care homes and other institutions deliver meals that accord with the ‘Eatwell’ ‘Livewell’ guidelines on healthy eating and that the majority of options on menus are healthy and plant-based, with less and better meat.​ Indeed I would go further that these guidelines and insist that the ideal would be to provide ONLY plant based meals: there is no nutritional justification to eat meat and the ethical argument cannot be ignored.

My child attends junior school and his meals are provided by a contractor. The provision of plant based meals is all but non-existent. This current academic term has 7 weeks. There are 35 meal combinations provided each week yet out of this, only one meal per week is plant based – this being a baked potato with baked beans and an apple, alternating with a baked potato with spaghetti hoops. 7 meals out of a total of 245! Theoretically he could opt for a plain baked potato each day followed by an apple, but I think you will agree that this would be unsatisfactory on so many levels. I have been told that the council has no authority over term time meal provision. My enquiry about the proposed holiday meal provision for children eligible for a free school meal has gone unanswered, as have my enquiries about care homes and adult social care. This cannot continue if the council is serious about reaching 0 carbon emissions. The council must take control over food provision in institutions which provide meals, including work canteens and should start with its own council offices.

A totally plant based school menu is achievable – and indeed is being provided in schools in Brazil. Leeds Council is including plant based meals in 180 schools with one non-meat day, one vegetarian day and the option of more plant based meals. But why settle for this when all children of all ethical and religious groups could be served plant based meals every day which satisfy all requirements, removing the need for wasteful and more costly “options”

In the wider community, retention of existing land holdings and making these available where suitable for community-supported agriculture and food businesses would create not only a useful product but brings people together while educating them about food and its growth, transferable skills that can be repeated in the domestic setting. To this end, the “Planting Up” initiative is to be encouraged. ​

Food growing provision (such as roof gardens, community orchards and edible landscaping, including nut and fruit trees) should be incorporated into all new developments; and support moves to retrofit existing developments with such provision. My mother was a young child during the second World War: an emergency situation which triggered immediate emergency response. As such, a vast proportion of community land was given over to cultivation of food and wealthier citizens with large gardens were also encouraged to join in a scheme which opened up recreational and garden spaces to community food production. She remembers with great fondness those times spent alongside her school friends each week tilling the soil, planting seeds and cultivating vegetables which the children were allowed to take home for a small charge, providing an affordable supplement to their rations raised with a minimal carbon footprint and (given that all children walked to school) zero food miles.