



Setting the standard

How **Food for Life**, a Soil Association pilot project, set the standard for school meals and food education



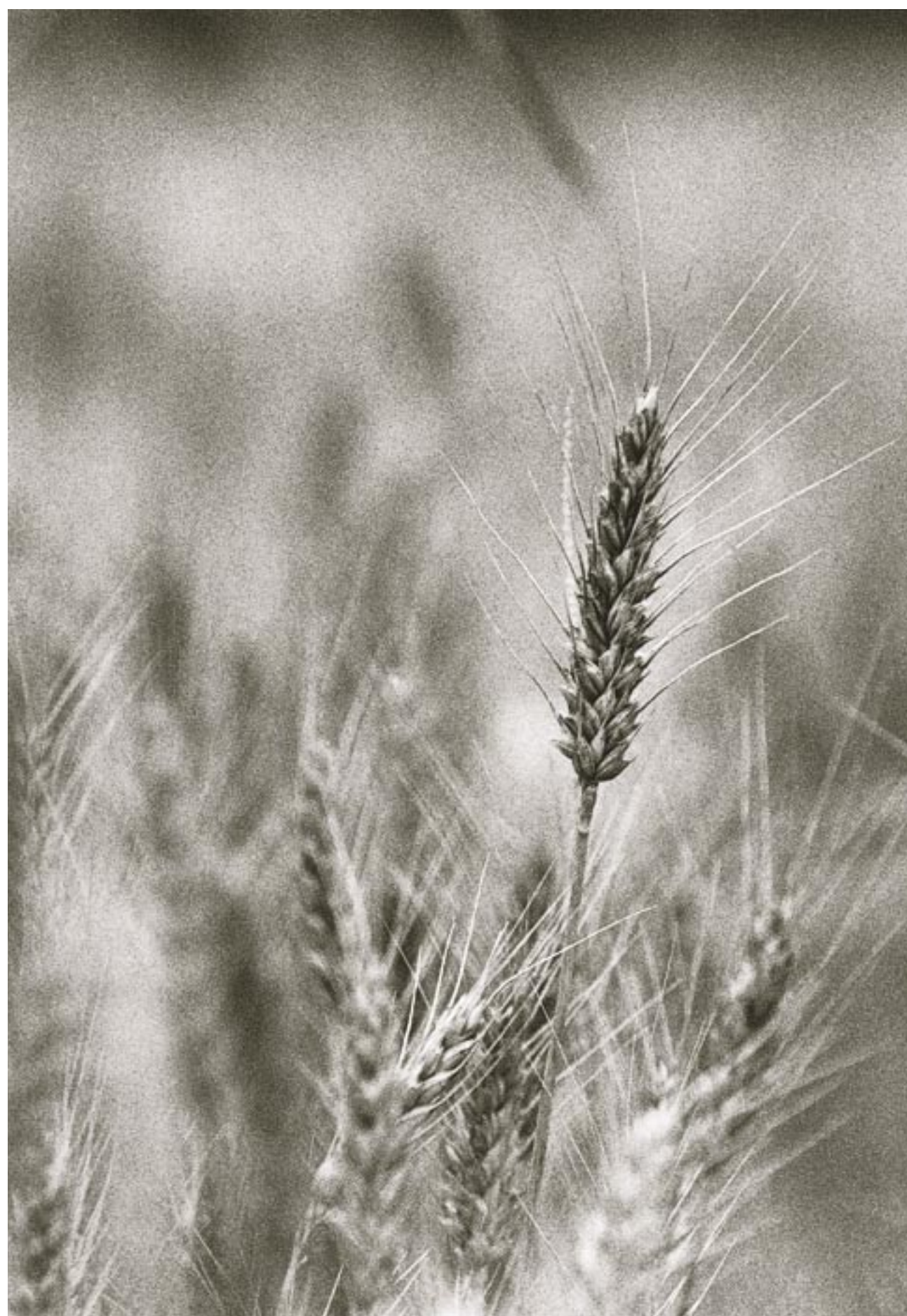
Hannah Pearce

The Soil Association

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How *Food for Life*, a Soil Association pilot project, set the standard for school meals and food education

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Executive Summary

- In October 2003 the Soil Association's *Food for Life*¹ report identified a range of major problems with school food provision in England and Wales. Many schools suffer poor food provision and, in many cases, lack adequate facilities or staff for fresh food preparation. As work continued, the severity of the problems uncovered has made the issue all the more pressing.
- Going further than most guidance from nutritionists, *Food for Life* linked school food provision with the escalating 'epidemic' of childhood obesity now threatening the long-term health of an entire generation. This position was subsequently endorsed by the medical establishment, most notably by the British Medical Association (BMA) in its June 2005 report on childhood obesity.²
- A national campaign launched by the Soil Association in October 2003 and massively amplified in April 2005 by Jamie Oliver's *Feed Me Better* campaign has forced the Government to address many of the issues raised by *Food for Life*.
- Across the country *Food for Life* has encouraged many heads and parents to pioneer reforms designed to dump junk food off school menus, restrict food choices, and return to healthier, simpler meals cooked from scratch using fresh (partly organic) and predominantly unprocessed ingredients to be served in a pleasant dining environment.
- In all schools that have implemented changes sufficient to comply with *Food for Life* targets, school meal uptake has increased dramatically.
- The *Food for Life* targets have provided a helpful framework for local authorities and schools to tackle their school meal provision and integrate the multiple needs of more nutritious food, food education and sustainable food sourcing in a way that leads to straight-forward, practical and successful action. Critically, such actions include getting children (and catering staff) on to farms to see and experience for themselves where food comes from and how it is grown, thus helping to ensure that new menus are acceptable to children.
- Long-term contracts between schools or local authorities and local food suppliers offer the only sustainable and cost effective means to ensure the provision of healthy, high quality school meals over the longer term. The School Meals Advisory Panel³ and the Sustainable Consumption Roundtable⁴ both recognised in 2005 that the development of such supply chains cannot come too soon. Under *Food for Life*, voluntary partnerships between imaginative producers and pioneering food buyers (in schools and catering organisations) have begun to establish secure patterns of affordable local sourcing from organic and extensive production systems for even the most basic of school meal ingredients.
- Some of the catering industry and parts of the food processing sector may continue to resist change of this kind until local authorities set clear health, environmental and educational targets within school meals contracts. Similarly, the realisation of a health and environmental double dividend in public sector food procurement will remain patchy until the Audit

¹ *Food for Life*, Pearce H., Soil Association 2003

² *Preventing Childhood Obesity*, BMA, 22 June 2005

³ *Turning the Tables: Transforming School Food*, DFES, September 2005

⁴ Pearce H., Green M. and Noble E., Soil Association and Cardiff University (2005): *Double dividend? Promoting good nutrition and sustainable consumption through healthy school meals*, Sustainable Consumption Roundtable

Executive Summary

Commission develops a framework for measuring 'Best Value' in school meals that gives adequate and meaningful weight to key sustainability impacts (e.g. climate, biodiversity, water, waste and the local economy) through the entire school food chain *within* the terms of the contract.

- Taking *Food for Life* on to the next stage, the Soil Association is now working in partnership with other key organisations with practical experience of delivering education about growing and cooking healthy food and implementing changes throughout the school to deliver healthy, sustainable school meals and a positive food culture.
- A new *Food for Life Mark* has been developed with Focus on Food, Garden Organic, the Health Education Trust, and advised by the Child Poverty Action Group, which will be the gold standard to which every school can aspire.
- This will provide a certified quality assurance scheme against which future best practice in school meal delivery and food education can be independently measured and evaluated.
- Significantly, the *Food for Life Mark* will provide information for pupils and current or prospective parents about a school's food culture and its performance in meeting the highest standards in school meal provision, food culture and food education.



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Foreword

“The *Food for Life* project by the Soil Association launched the public debate on the quality of school meals”

Jamie Oliver

***Food for Life*
targets:**

meals made from scratch using fresh ingredients that are predominantly unprocessed (75%), substantially locally sourced (50%) and partly organic (30%).

Who would have thought it?

Only three years after a handful of schools started improving their food, school meals are headline news.

Who could have imagined that celebrity chef, Jamie Oliver, would hand the Prime Minister a petition signed by a quarter of a million people, demanding more Government money for better school food?

Jamie’s rise in 2005 as a national figurehead for healthy school food was fast, essential and highly effective. But the change he catalysed was far more than the achievement of one remarkable man and his fantastic TV series. It rests substantially on the work of many pioneers of better meals, and on the impacts of the less visible but highly-crafted political campaign by the Soil Association.

The Soil Association’s *Food for Life* programme began in 2002. It was informed by the work of other key organisations, particularly the Caroline Walker Trust and Health Education Trust, and many inspiring individuals. The Soil Association’s work began quietly when a pilot group of schools set about changing menus dominated by processed foods. Meals high in added salt, fat and sugar were replaced with meals made from scratch using fresh ingredients that were predominantly unprocessed (75%), substantially locally sourced (50%) and partly organic (30%). They also complied with the nutrition guidelines developed by the Caroline Walker Trust.

In October 2003, when the *Food for Life* report brought the scandal of school meals to the attention of the media – reaching over 14 million

people – the practical experience gained in those schools provided a tried and tested alternative that would inspire many more schools to follow.

Further work with a growing number of schools gave the Soil Association crucial evidence about the feasibility of wholesale change that informed numerous policy meetings with ministers, political advisors and civil servants over the next two years. It also informed the Soil Association’s policies for school meal reform on a national scale. These have since been endorsed by the School Meals Review Panel and almost entirely accepted and acted upon by the Government.

The challenge now is to ensure all schools provide meals that truly deliver health and well-being to Britain’s children. Inspiring children to eat well is fundamental to developing a sustainable food culture.

Working with schools and Local Education Authorities *Food for Life* has established a proven framework to:

- Ensure each school develops a holistic food and nutrition policy.
- Deliver robust food education to all members of the school community, including a farm visit for all pupils.
- Ensure that all children learn how to grow and cook food.
- Improve the nutrition delivered to children in line with the standards recommended by the School Meals Review Panel in September 2005.
- Curb the environmental impacts of the food served in schools.
- Contribute directly to the development of sustainable patterns of public sector food purchasing.

Foreword

- Help create a connected and sustainable food and farming system in the UK.

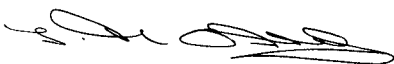
Widespread adoption and delivery of this ambitious model could transform the food choices and health prospects of an entire generation. Such change cannot come too soon. But it will take place much faster where schools can show they offer an accredited service that deserves parental confidence.

To that end, the Soil Association and key partners – the Health Education Trust, Focus on Food and Garden Organic have developed the *Food for Life Mark*. This is an approach to improving school meals and a benchmark which all schools can work towards. This will provide a quality assurance scheme against which future best practice in school meal provision, and in education about growing food, farming, healthy eating and practical cooking skills, can be independently measured and attested.

Good nutrition and health, the understanding of where food comes from and how it is produced, and knowing how to cook, are vital for every child. The *Food for Life Mark* offers a ‘gold standard’ towards which every school should aspire and which every child deserves.



Peter Melchett
(Policy Director), and



Jeanette Orrey
(Schools Meals Policy Advisor)



Introduction

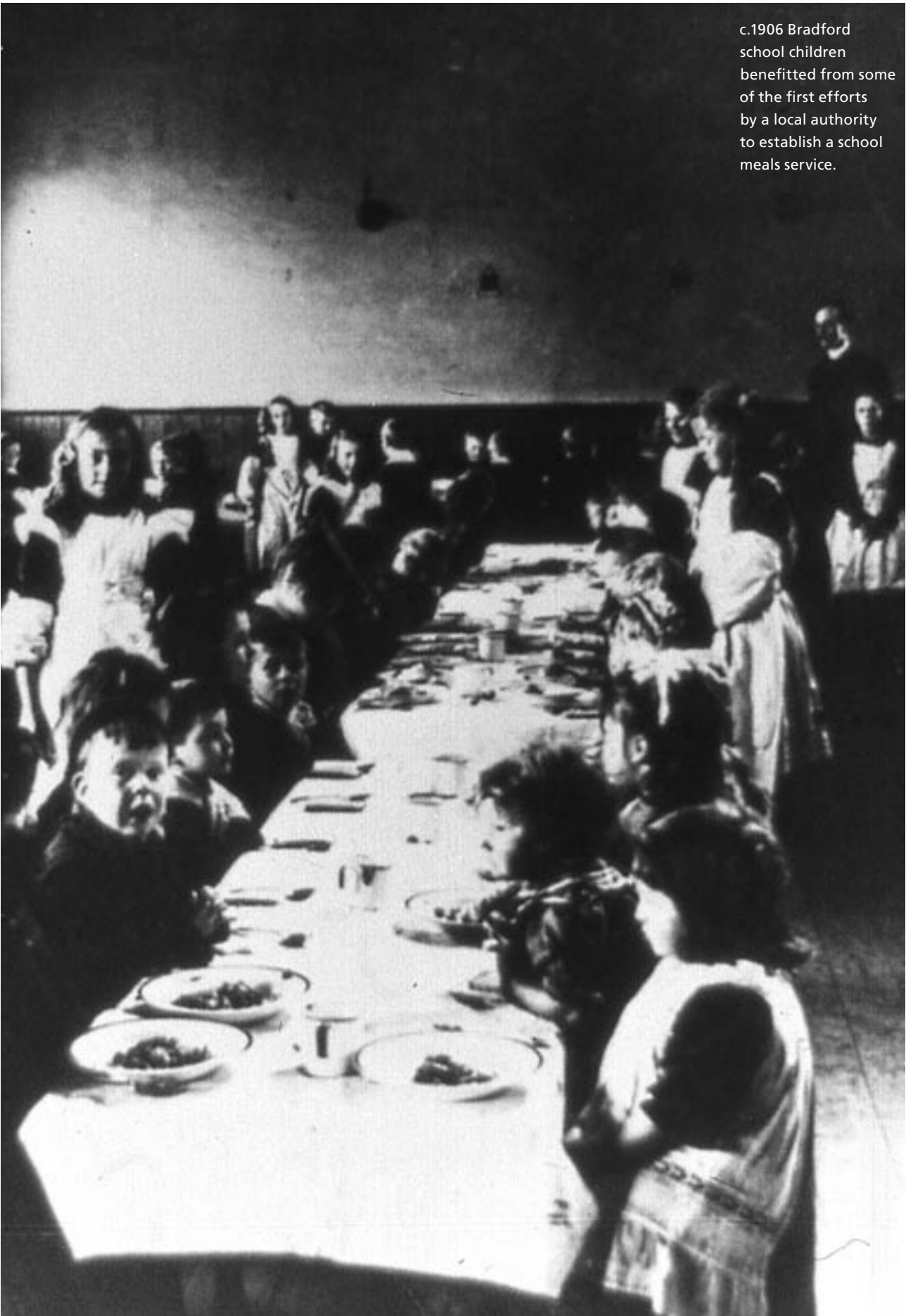
In October 2003 the Soil Association's *Food for Life* report re-ignited a twenty five year-old debate about the quality and nutritional value of food served to school children in England and Wales. It was not fully anticipated that within hours, the media would generate coverage sufficient to persuade the majority of a 14-million strong audience that school catering had become a national scandal.

Two years on, this report records how and why the Government has been spurred into action. In April 2005 the Government pledged robust nutritional standards for school meals from September 2006. It has also funded some of the changes required to reverse decades of public policy failure and neglect.

This report explains why the provision of nutritious school meals is as relevant today as it was one hundred years ago. It provides a chronology of the *Food for Life* campaign, discusses what has been learnt and describes how *Food for Life* provides a framework for transforming school meals and school food culture.



c.1906 Bradford school children benefitted from some of the first efforts by a local authority to establish a school meals service.



Section 1

1870–2003: Yesterday’s lessons for today’s menu

“School meals are an essential public service no less important today than when they were introduced at the beginning of the last century.”

Suzi Leather, Chair of the School Meals Review Panel

More than a century ago the Victorians began providing school meals in response to chronic childhood malnutrition. In 1906, The *Education (Provision of Meals) Act* encouraged local authorities to provide school meals. This set off a process that led to universal school meal provision after 1945. Today we have come full circle. Just two decades after councils no longer had to provide school meals, the BMA called on ministers to improve the health of school pupils. They recommended this should be done through the provision of healthy school meals – adhering to strict nutritional guidelines.

In the 1870s when elementary education first became mandatory, it was observed that many children came to school poorly fed – particularly those from poor backgrounds. In response many school boards established charitable facilities serving food to help children concentrate and learn better.⁵

Provision became more widespread when it emerged that men recruited during the Boer War (1899–1902) were so underweight, undernourished and generally unfit they could not fight effectively. As a result, in 1906,⁶ the Government gave local authorities voluntary powers to subsidise school meals to ensure children and young people were fed well.

Statutory provision

The 1944 Education Act gave local authorities their first statutory duty to provide free milk and a hot meal to any child that wanted one. These had to be “similar in all respects to the main meal of the day” and sufficient to deliver roughly a third of their daily

Bradford – School food pioneer

In April 1907 Bradford Education Committee’s school medical officer undertook an experiment. The aim was to show how providing well-balanced meals at breakfast and lunchtime could benefit a small group of malnourished local school children. Six months later Bradford Council converted a school gym to establish a central kitchen and became the first of many across the UK to introduce a scheme to serve school meals to “necessitous” children in six feeding centres across the city.

Demand was high, especially from homes where both parents worked, so within five months the number of meals served had risen to more than 1700. A year later many other councils were sending representatives to learn from Bradford’s experience and to observe a service that had expanded to also provide breakfast (warm milk, bread and jam or porridge with treacle and hot milk) to nearly 1500 children from families where the father was unemployed. By April 1909, the authorities were dishing up a staggering 1700 breakfasts and over 3000 lunches from 20 feeding centres and had produced a booklet distributed freely to every school family detailing the recipes used.

In 1913 a five-year review of the service noted “the majority of teachers say the children benefit both physically and mentally by the meals, and have therefore increased ability to take full advantage of the education provided for them.” And that “children respond very quickly to quiet, refined surroundings. The clean light, airy room the order and the cheerful kindness shown them by the teachers cannot fail to be an influence for good.”⁷

Today Bradford Educational Services serves over 50,000 meals a day for a price that remains the second lowest in the country. Echoing the leadership shown a century ago, it has also pioneered the move to local sourcing for fresh ingredients.

⁵ *The School Meals Service – from its beginnings to the present day*, Berger N., Northcote House, 1992).

⁶ *The Education (Provision of Meals) Act 1906* allowed city councils to provide school meals if they wanted it and to levy a rate of a halfpenny in the pound to cover costs if funds from voluntary sources proved insufficient.

⁷ *Take a Bite Into, a Cross Curricular Resource Pack for Schools* (examining the history of school meals in Bradford), City of Bradford Metropolitan Council 1994.

Section 1

1870–2003: Yesterday's lessons for today's menu

nutritional needs for a regulated price.⁸

In 1945 the Ministry of Education described, school meals as having “a vital place in national policy for nutrition and well being of children”. From 1947 the Government met the full net cost of providing universal school meals.⁹

Dismantling the service

A universal hot meals service continued for four decades until the arrival of Mrs. Thatcher's Government. It pledged to halve the amount spent on school meals. It also relieved Local Education Authorities (LEAs) of any obligation to provide a fixed-price meal of specified quality for all state school children.

Under the 1980 Education Act local politicians were given the power to determine the type, price and nutritional content of meals they served. Free school milk for 5–7 year olds became a discretionary provision. The only statutory requirement was to offer free meals (of no specified quality) for any child entitled to them under welfare benefit rules.

These changes undermined the viability of many school meals services. At least a dozen shire counties promptly disbanded all hot meal provision and told schools they could convert kitchens to extra teaching space. Today more than 20 LEAs offer nothing more than the free school meal provision, in the form of a cold packed lunch, for primary school children. Many local authorities were forced to turn secondary school canteens into cash cafeterias in order to drive down labour and ingredient costs. Catering managers thus began using fast ‘convenience’ and cheap frozen processed foods that required less preparation and

could be served with minimal effort.

In 1988 the *Local Government Act* introduced compulsory competitive tendering (CCT). This obliged all LEAs to put their school meals services out to tender in a process where cost was king and quality often lost out. In time many area contracts were let to private sector companies, often in return for capital to pay for essential kitchen repairs and maintenance.

Slow change

Nothing was done throughout the 1980s to regulate what was being served in schools. But in 1992, an expert working party convened by the Caroline Walker Trust (CWT) published quantitative ‘nutrient-based’ guidelines for school caterers.¹⁰ Nevertheless this guidance was ignored by Governments for more than another decade. In 1998 the newly elected labour Government pledged to upgrade the school meals service.¹¹ In 2001 it introduced a system of nutritionally weak ‘food-based’ standards. The race for the bottom in school food provision further accelerated when ‘best value’ arrived to replace CCT for public service procurement. This change, coupled with a move to delegate decision-making about food services down to all secondary schools (and to primaries who wished to opt out), helped ensure that school meal provision became *more* profit-led.

Resistance to school food reform continued apace. In 1999, even the National Healthy Schools Standard, which required schools to look at healthy eating, made no reference to school meal provision. A year later the Department of Health's School Fruit

⁸ Berger, N. *The School Meals Service – From its beginnings to the present day*, Northcote House, 1992

⁹ Berger, N. *The School Meals Service – From its beginnings to the present day*, Northcote House, 1992

¹⁰ *Nutritional Guidelines for School Meals - Report of an Expert Working Group*, Caroline Walker Trust, London, 1992

¹¹ *Ingredients for Success: a consultation paper on nutritional standards for school lunches*. DfEE, October 1998. ISBN: 0 85522 884 9.

and Vegetable Scheme gave nearly two million infant school children a free piece of fruit or vegetable every school day, but made no link with lunch provision. In early 2001 the health and education ministries kicked off their joint *Food in Schools* programme with its ‘whole-school approach to healthy eating and drinking’ but once again ignored the question of what was offered at lunchtime.

Progress at last

In the end it fell to the Scottish Executive to be first to wake up to the lessons from history. Faced with some of the highest diet-related chronic disease rates in the world the administration in Edinburgh accepted the advice of its expert task force.¹² In 2002, through its *Hungry for Success* programme, it reinstated a robust statutory regime for school meals based on the CWT guidelines.

Despite the clamour created by the *Food for Life* report in October 2003, the Government’s *Healthy Living Blueprint for Schools*, published six months later, was meagre. It pledged only to revise existing food-based school meal standards in secondary schools and review them for primaries. It was to be March 2005 before a newly-appointed Secretary of State for Education, Ruth Kelly, in reaction to Jamie Oliver’s hugely successful TV series, promised a new regime built around tough nutritional standards.



¹² Expert Panel on School Meals (2002), *Hungry for Success. A Whole School Approach to School Meals in Scotland*

CASE STUDY

Eat well, do well, play well in Hull

By 2002 Hull was suffering from some of the poorest levels of child health and educational attainment in the country. In one telling statistic, life expectancy for a boy from Hull was estimated to be some 6 years less than a contemporary growing up in Kingston upon Thames. Similarly, at GCSE only 34.7% of Hull children secured 5A*-C passes compared to a national average of 53.7%.¹³ To address these health inequalities, the city council sought a 'power to innovate' ruling from Government in 2003, to re-establish the free provision of good quality, healthy, nutritious school lunches to all of Hull's primary pupils. The scheme started in April 2004 and will run for at least 3 years.

The Hull programme has four strands:

- Free healthy lunches for all. This involved new menus and a higher spend on ingredients to enable use of more fresh produce. Linked to this provision some local schools provide summer holiday cookery classes for parents and children.
- Free healthy breakfasts in primary and special schools, now used by nearly a fifth of all those attending state primaries in Hull. Reflecting experience elsewhere the provision has reduced truancy, improved



punctuality and aided concentration in the classroom.

- Simple healthy refreshments for after-school clubs – fruit, digestive biscuits, milk and fruit juice.
- An extension of the national fruit scheme to ensure all children in primaries and special schools (and not just 6-8 year olds) are offered one free fruit or vegetable snack per day.

How did Hull achieve this?

To ensure the mandatory participation of all local state schools in their free service Hull had to 'de-delegate' or regain total control of school meal budgets. They also had to guarantee that none of the money required to deliver the changes would come out of general school budgets. This included cash required to pay for the extra supervision over lunchtime or crossing patrols required to provide safe access to breakfast clubs.

Kitchen infrastructure, staff training and development also required additional investment. Kitchens needed equipment more suited to healthy food preparation e.g. steamers, grills and increased storage for fresh produce. Some 35 of a total of 86 primary schools don't have their own kitchen, a

¹³ Personal communication, June 2005, Rayma Crawford, Pupil and Student Support Manager, Hull City Council

situation the council is keen to remedy. Another major issue has been the legacy of competitive tendering on de-skilling and staff training. In the words of one school cook "I used to just open packets and use trays and it's been a real challenge to learn what's entailed in proper food preparation for large numbers". Each cook has had two weeks extensive training in cooking skills.

Rayma Crawford, pupil and student support manager, Hull City Council says, "When we started introducing the healthy menus some children didn't even recognise a lot of the food and a fair few struggled to use a knife and fork. Many parents also took some persuading there would no longer be a stigma attached to filling out a registration form for free school meals, although offering better meals for free certainly helped people listen much more closely to what we wanted to do."

In terms of benefits, anecdotally many local heads and teachers are convinced that concentration and behaviour has definitely improved. Demand for cookery classes from parents has also grown massively, suggesting beneficial knock-on effects at home. To measure progress, extensive in-school monitoring by a team from Hull University has been underway since the start of the project and is due to report next year.

In the meantime several other councils have been keen to learn more about the scheme and a couple are looking closely at how they might emulate the changes made in Hull. Liverpool extended its free fruit scheme to all primary and special school children from September 2005. In 2006 the Government moved to allow all English LEA's to follow Hulls lead. The Education and Inspectors Bill changes the existing 'duty to charge' into a 'power to charge'; this will enable schools and local authorities to provide free meals, including breakfast, if they wish to do so.

"When we started introducing the healthy menus some children didn't even recognise a lot of the food and a fair few struggled to use a knife and fork."

Rayma Crawford, pupil and student support manager, Hull City Council





Section 2

2003: Food for Life reframes School Food

Food for Life began in 2002 as a pilot project to use the school meal as a vehicle to create a vibrant food culture in schools and their wider communities.

The vision, first created by Jeanette Orrey, then school cook at St Peter's Primary, East Bridgford, Nottinghamshire and her head teacher David Maddison, was for children to eat healthy and delicious home-cooked food, in a calm and sociable dining environment. The produce sourced was of good quality from local and organic producers. Catering staff were valued as a key part of the school. Links were built into the school's curriculum to ensure that during their primary school years the children would develop a deep understanding of good food (including where it comes from) sufficient to influence their choices as they move into secondary school.

As a starting point *Food for Life* asks school catering managers to replace menus dominated by low grade, processed foods high in added salt, fat and sugar, with nutritious, tasty meals prepared from scratch. This is to be done using fresh ingredients that are predominantly unprocessed (75%), substantially locally sourced (50 %) and partly organic (30%). Alongside this *Food for Life* also asks teachers to seed and cultivate a healthy and sustainable food culture through practical and creative food education linked to many different parts of the curriculum – including the growing and cooking of food and farm visits.

This model for delivering change in school meal provision was designed to address several different but related concerns including:

- An emerging public and political consensus (led by the Caroline Walker Trust, the Health Education Trust, the Child Poverty Action Group, the Soil Association and many academics and other experts) that the long-term health and intellectual prospects of an entire generation of children are being blighted by poor diets too high in fat, sugar and salt.
- The potential for heart disease and rapidly escalating levels of childhood obesity to impose huge costs on the nation's health and welfare system within a few short decades.
- Growing evidence that better nutrition offers the most important means to improve concentration, behaviour and attainment in our schools with long term benefits to the UK's economic productivity and society.
- The findings of the Curry Commission and its recommendation that priority be given to reconnecting consumers with food producers and the Government's desire to encourage sustainable patterns of public sector food purchasing and subsequent targets set by the Organic Action Plan and Defra's Food Procurement Initiative.

In 2002 the Soil Association was approached by Lizzie Vann (Organix Brands), Jeanette Orrey and Simon Brennman (then working to promote local sourcing with the Soil Association). They argued that the most effective way to address these issues in a fully connected manner was through better and more creative food education in schools.

Section 2

2003: Food for Life reframes School Food

BMA recommendations on nutrition in schools

- All schools should make free water available from clean and hygienic sources.
- Schools should provide food that conforms to nutritional guidelines and use the curriculum to reinforce messages around healthy eating.
- There should be mandatory nutrient and compositional standards for school meals.
- Food education and the acquisition of related practical skills should be compulsory, with special emphasis on how to provide healthy meals on a low income.
- Teachers should receive relevant training (on nutrition and healthy food preparation).
- School food contractors should be encouraged to use healthy food preparation methods.
- The free fruit and vegetable scheme should be expanded to all primary and nursery school children.
- The sale of unhealthy food and drink products from school vending machines should be banned in secondary and upper schools to continue the healthy eating message given in primary schools.

They also believed there needed to be an inseparable commitment to provide locally-sourced and nutritious food to every school child.

Nothing since 2003 has emerged to challenge this vision. Indeed the evidence on all fronts has escalated. For example, in the same month that *Food for Life* was published the leading scientist and broadcaster Lord Winston drew the nation's attention to the links between the supply of key nutrients in children's diets and their capacity to learn enough to fulfill their potential.¹⁴

Compelling evidence has also continued to accumulate regarding the way in which poor childhood nutrition is feeding an epidemic of childhood obesity and early onset type II diabetes in teenagers and young adults. Most recently, in its June 2005 report on preventing childhood obesity¹⁵ the British Medical Association warned "The health behaviour of the nation's children needs to be addressed immediately in order to ameliorate the long-term effects of poor nutrition and lack of exercise" and that more meaningful changes in policy are needed on such issues as school nutrition.

Wider environmental and sustainability issues are also addressed by the *Food for Life* model. This year compelling new evidence has emerged supporting this intention to encourage the use of local and organic supplies in schools.

What citizens of the EU choose to eat and how that food is produced currently has more impact on climate change than *any other aspect of daily life*.¹⁶ This was a key finding in a study completed for the European Commission. Most specifically, our current food choices and production systems are responsible for 31% of the global warming potential of all products consumed within the EU.¹⁶ Furthermore, within this alarming figure, the impact of high meat and dairy consumption along with the processing of meat show up as having a disproportionately high impact.

Approximately £360 million is spent each year on food served in schools. This is around 20% of the £1.8 billion spent by the public sector in England on food and catering. Recognising this as an important area of public expenditure, the National Consumer Council and the Sustainable Development Commission's Roundtable on Sustainable Consumption has placed a specific focus on this agenda in its recent work. A study, *Double dividend?*,¹⁷ published in November 2005, examines in detail the range of health and environmental (especially climate change) benefits that will be reaped if school food menus become more seasonal and if local and organic produce is used frequently.

¹⁴ Winston R., TV documentary *Human Mind*, BBC1 (October 2003). Featured results emerging from the largest and most extensive study ever done to examine the impact of fatty acid supplementation on a range of learning conditions.

¹⁵ *Preventing childhood obesity*, BMA Board of Science, June 2005

¹⁶ Tukker A., Huppes G., Guinee J., Heijungs R., de Koning A., van Oers L., Suh S., Geerken T., Van Holderbeke M., Jansen B. and Nielsen P. (2005) *Environmental impact of products (EIPRO): Analysis of the life cycle environmental impacts related to the total final consumption of the EU25*, European Science and Technology Observatory and Institute for Prospective Technological studies, full draft report, April 2005; p92

¹⁷ Pearce H., Green M. and Noble E., Soil Association and Cardiff University (2005): *Double dividend? Promoting good nutrition and sustainable consumption through healthy school meals*, Sustainable Consumption Roundtable

Section 3

2003–2005 campaign landmarks and achievements

The Soil Association's Food for Life targets for school meals ask that:

- School lunches should aim to provide food that meets the nutrition targets established by the Caroline Walker Trust.
- At least 75% of all foods consumed (over a week) be made from unprocessed ingredients.
- At least 50% of meal ingredients be sourced from the local region.
- At least 30% of food served should be from certified organic sources.
- Better classroom education on food, cooking and sustainable food production, ensuring that all children visit a farm at least once during their time at school.

In October 2003 the *Food for Life* report launched a well-timed debate about the deplorable state of school meals across England and Wales. Drawing attention to how much more was spent on food in prisons even compared to schools, it explained to policymakers why reform was essential. Detailing a handful of pioneers already pursuing a different vision it provided undeniable evidence that, with little extra investment, achievable change could transform what children eat and learn about good food in school.

Massive media coverage reaching over 14 million people within the first week generated a wave of public outrage. Meanwhile Jamie Oliver took the brave and inspired decision to make a television series about whether it was possible to deliver a food revolution on a shoestring budget at an inner city comprehensive in Greenwich (and subsequently across the entire London borough).

In the background, and while Oliver made his programmes, the Soil Association held a number of meetings in Whitehall. They lobbied civil servants and ministers about the step change in attitude and action needed by the Government. Alongside this, a string of visionary heads and determined parents set off their own local 'disturbances' to challenge the status quo and run mediocrity out of town. Such initiatives were informed by the 7,000 *Food for Life* action packs distributed over the past two years, the *Food for Life* helpline and visits from Jeanette Orrey, the Soil Association's school meals policy advisor.

Meanwhile, the Soil Association worked on the ground with local authorities and over 500 schools in England, Scotland and

Wales to pilot the *Food for Life* approach. In many instances the *Food for Life* targets provided a crucial way to get the right people around a table so partnerships could form that delivered practical and successful action. Activity included:

- Working with cooks in Shropshire.
- Developing local and organic supply chains in East Ayrshire, the Highlands, Bristol and Bath.
- Running inspirational education workshops and farm visits in London, Cornwall, Bristol and elsewhere.

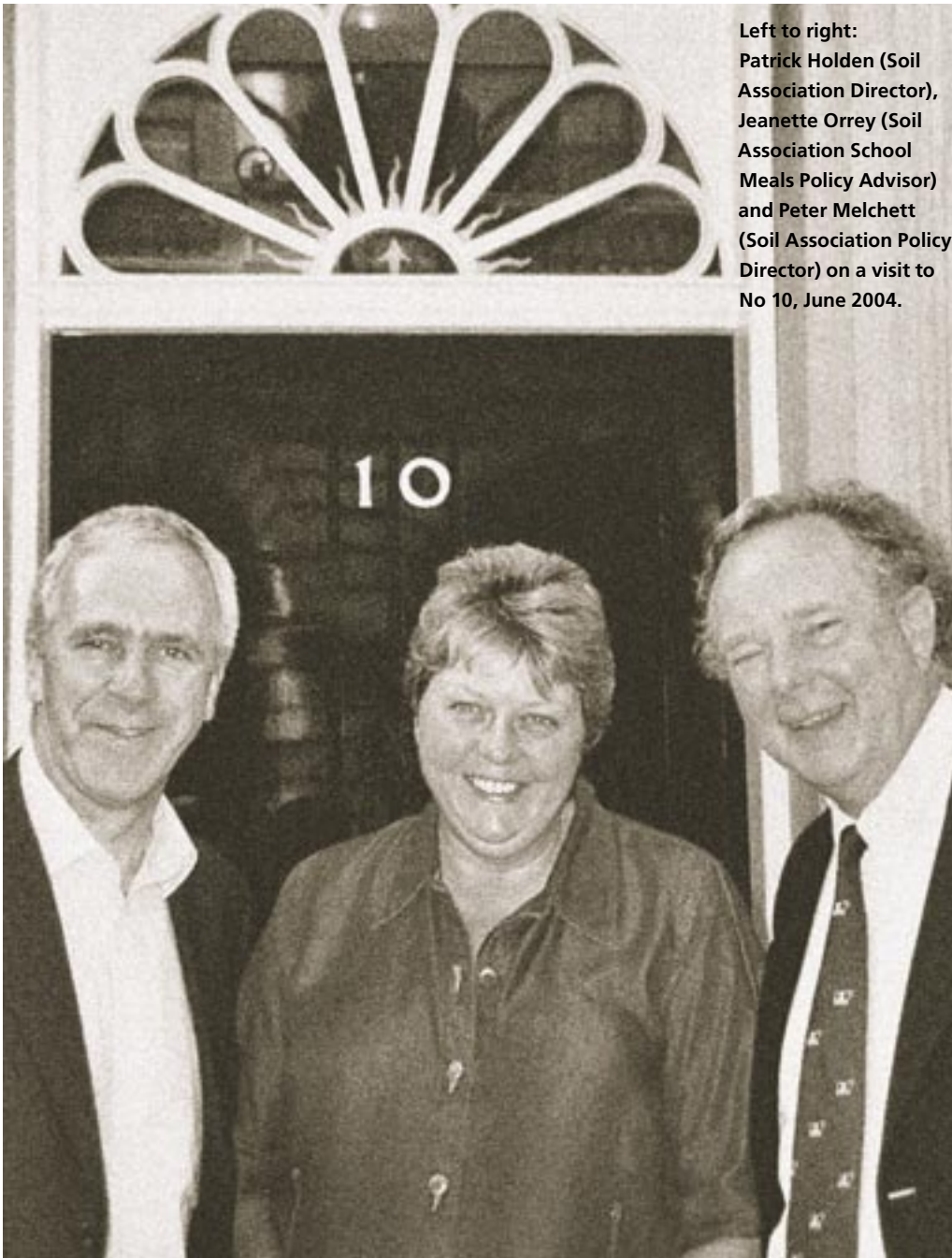
All this work helped fuel the parallel policy activity by providing examples of where *Food for Life* has succeeded in changing school meals and school food culture.

Later in 2005, the Soil Association and Cardiff University joined forces and wrote a report looking at how to integrate sustainability into the new school meal standards. Headline recommendations included a move to seasonality, and local and organic sourcing down shorter supply chains (by buying local produce).¹⁸

The result is a sea change in policy and a bubbling revolution in school food provision.

¹⁸ Pearce H., Green M. and Noble E., Soil Association and Cardiff University (2005): *Double dividend? Promoting good nutrition and sustainable consumption through healthy school meals*, Sustainable Consumption Roundtable

Food for Life – a chronology of the campaign



Left to right:
Patrick Holden (Soil
Association Director),
Jeanette Orrey (Soil
Association School
Meals Policy Advisor)
and Peter Melchett
(Soil Association Policy
Director) on a visit to
No 10, June 2004.

Food for Life – a chronology of the campaign



St Peter's Primary School, East Bridgford Nottingham is named joint winner of the Local Food Initiative of the Year in the Soil Association Food Awards.

Powys public procurement partnership publish report on local and local organic food in hospitals and schools facilitated and co-written by the Soil Association.



Lizzie Vann talks at Soil Association processor conference about school meals. Patrick Holden, Director of the Soil Association, invites her to speak at the Soil Association's National Conference.

Lizzie Vann addresses the Soil Association Conference about local and organic food in schools and receives a standing ovation.

On the same day Lizzie Vann, St Peter's School Cook Jeanette Orrey and local food specialist Simon Brenman challenge the Soil Association to design and test a model of sustainable, healthy, school meal provision.



Food for Life (FFL) pilot project starts in five schools to test whether it is possible to deliver food that meets FFL targets.

Patrick Holden, Peter Melchett, Soil Association Policy Director and Lizzie Vann meet with Secretary of State for Education, Charles Clarke, to discuss forthcoming Soil Association report on school meals.



Soil Association publishes *Food for Life – healthy, local, organic school meals*, a headline winning report (written by Hannah Pearce). FFL Scotland report published.



The Soil Association's FFL curriculum pack on healthy food and organic farming sells like hot cakes and reprints in record time. 2,400 copies are downloaded from the website.

FFL action pack is developed to help schools and caterers to adopt FFL targets.

Lord Whitty, Food and Farming Minister at Defra, visits St Peter's Primary School with Peter Melchett.

Despite encouragement from Charles Clarke, Peter Melchett, Jeanette Orrey and Lizzie Vann encounter substantial opposition within Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to nutritional standards and more money for school meals.

Jamie Oliver visits Jeanette Orrey at St Peter's Primary School in Nottinghamshire, and agrees to speak at the Soil Association conference in January.



Jeanette Orrey (Catering Manager at St Peter's) joins Soil Association part time to work as its School Meals Policy Advisor.



HRH Prince of Wales holds discussions about healthy school meals with teachers, pupils, school cooks and farmers at a Soil Association event in Skipton, North Yorkshire.

Peter Melchett discusses FFL policy recommendations with ministerial advisors, and Peter and Patrick Holden meet Charles Clarke at DfES again. The Minister says he wants the Soil Association as 'partners' but DfES still oppose new standards or new money to improve school meals. They imply the catering companies would block such changes.



Peter Melchett, Patrick Holden and Jeanette Orrey meet the Prime Minister's policy advisors in Downing Street to discuss school meals.

Pioneering local authority caterer Kay Knight of South Gloucestershire hosts HRH Prince of Wales at a one day Soil Association seminar. It is held at a local school and HRH Prince of Wales's Highgrove estate to showcase innovation in local sourcing and fresh, healthy school meal provision, to chief executives and directors of education from 15 local authorities.

School catering companies Scolarest and Sodhexo join with the Local Authority Catering Association and the Soil Association to write to Education Minister Charles Clarke. They demand quantified nutritional standards for school meals within a whole school approach to healthy eating to be inspected by Ofsted, to be supported by enhanced training for cooks and with extra cash for better ingredients.

Hurlford Primary School, Kilmarnock reaches FFL targets.

| November 2002 | December 2002 | January 2003 | March 2003 | September 2003 | 6 October 2003 | Nov – Dec 2003 | Jan – March 2004 | June – July 2004 |
|---------------|---------------|--------------|--|----------------|---|---|---|--|
| | | | Consumers' Association, now Which?, publishes alarming results of a survey (by health nutritionist Helen Crawley) based on school food diaries kept by English and Welsh school children for a week in October 2002. | | Extensive media coverage ensures key messages in FFL reach an audience of 14 million. Education Secretary Charles Clarke welcomes report. Many involved in school meals accuse the Soil Association of scare mongering, and condemn the report's description of some school food as 'muck off a truck'. | Promoting a national conference on sustainable food procurement in the public sector, food and farming minister Lord Whitty visits pioneering FFL primary Thomas Fairchild Community School, Hackney. | Parents at St Paul's School in Primrose Hill, north London, raid their school kitchen to discover banned imported chicken in the freezer a month after caterer Scolarest was told to stop using it in children's lunches. | Food Standards Agency (FSA) publishes survey of food provided in secondary schools showing that 20% of secondary schools fail on a daily basis to meet nutritional guidelines imposed since April 2001. Least popular lunchtime choices are fruit (2%), fruit juice (3%), and vegetables or salads (6%). Most popular are burgers, chips and other potato products cooked in oil (48%) along with soft drinks (45%) and cake or muffin (24%). Charles Clarke pledges to review the nutritional standards that apply to secondary schools but kicks primary school meal reform into the long grass once again by saying DfES must conduct its own research before introducing changes to primary school food. |

| Sept – Oct 2004 | Nov – Dec 2004 | Jan – Feb 2005 | March 2005 | April 2005 | May – August 2005 | September 2005 | October 2005 | Nov – Dec 2005 |
|--|---|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| <p>The Government's <i>Healthy Living Blue Print for Schools</i> pledges to halt obesity among under 12s but leaves school meal reform almost entirely off its menu.</p> <p>Speaking to the Labour Party annual conference Education Secretary Charles Clarke says he will watch "very very carefully" the results of Hull City Council's scheme to give all primary school children free school meals.</p> | <p>Public Health White Paper <i>Choosing Health – Making Healthier Choices Easier</i> pledges to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> revise secondary and primary school meal standards to cut down fat, salt and sugar from 2006 strongly consider introducing nutrient-based standards, and subject to legislation extend these to cover food served across the whole school day give Ofsted a responsibility to inspect school meals. <p>"Bootiful! Banned in Scotland but good enough for English children."</p> <p>In an article in <i>The Guardian</i>, Katherine Quarmby broke the story that turkey meals produced by Bernard Matthews are still being served up to English pupils even though they fail healthy eating guidelines established for Scottish primary schools.</p>  <p>Two days later Ruth Kelly is appointed Secretary of State for Education with a new remit for school meals reform.</p> | <p>Health Education Trust launches an independent national database of information on catering excellence in schools, to provide a framework and a venue for easy access and communication of relevant information.</p> <p>In a compelling TV series about the need for school meal reform, celebrity chef Jamie Oliver touches a national nerve and wins the ear of an estimated 5 million parents and teachers.</p> <p>Days later Ruth Kelly makes new policy commitments to crack down on processed foods in school meals. However she fails to impose quantified minimum nutritional standards or to provide more money to pay for decent ingredients and extra hours in the kitchen to prepare fresh meals.</p> | <p>20 March in an <i>Observer</i> article outlining Labour's initiatives to improve school meals, Tony Blair said: "The new School Food Trust... will draw on the remarkable work of Jamie Oliver in schools, of the Soil Association in encouraging the use of organic and local produce in school meals, and on the best advice on nutrition and eliminating processed foods."</p> <p>Creating a well-timed climax to his <i>Feed Me Better</i> campaign Jamie Oliver delivers a 271,677 signature petition to Tony Blair while demanding more money for school meals and a ban on junk food in canteens.</p> <p>The Government announces:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> that from September 2006 every state school child in England will have to be offered a hot meal at lunchtime that conforms to improved nutritional standards £220m "transitional" funding will raise the amount spent on food per pupil to 50p in primary schools and 60p in secondary schools a new School Food Trust will provide independent advice to parents and governing bodies on ways to improve school food.  | <p>Merton Parents for Better Food in Schools starts the first high-profile campaign targeting inadequate local authority oversight of an area-wide contract let to the private sector.</p> <p>While electioneering the Prime Minister's wife Cherie Blair admits that, as a parent, she has personal concerns about school food served to her youngest son Leo.</p> <p>National newspaper articles run coverage suggesting that many schools under long term commercial catering contracts, especially those awarded under Private Finance Initiative (PFI) regimes, may never be able to require their service providers to upgrade menus and ingredients.</p> | <p>The National Governors' Council and FSA publish a framework to support the role that school governors play in developing food policy within schools.</p> <p>DfES confirms it is working with the Teacher Training Agency, and the FSA to develop nationally-accredited vocational qualification for school support staff in cookery craft skills, new nutritional standards and school food procurement.</p> | <p>The School Meals Review Panel publishes a robust report that states: "the aspiration for school lunches should be a hot meal, cooked on the premises from fresh and seasonal ingredients" and that there is "huge scope for linking sustainable food procurement with improved education for children about where food comes from." The report also suggests that "improving food in schools may contribute to improved attainment and behaviour".</p> | <p>Mayor Ken Livingstone sends Jamie Oliver's <i>Feed Me Better</i> advice pack to every school in London.</p> <p>Unison publishes a report claiming that long term PFI contracts block decent school meals. They also highlight that nearly a third of 417 schools currently under PFI do not have a kitchen capable of cooking a meal from fresh ingredients.</p> <p>Stephen Crowne, Director of Resources at DfES, confirms at the high profile business conference in London that in future no one will be able "to build a school without a kitchen..."</p> <p>Education Minister, Ruth Kelly, launches a national audit of school food provision covering issues such as uptake rates, ingredient spend, preparation methods and whether meals are hot or cold. She also asks the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority to consider, as part of its Key Stage 3 review, how to put a greater emphasis on teaching practical caching skills to 11–14 year-olds in secondary schools.</p>  | <p>FFL pioneer East Ayrshire wins <i>The Guardian</i> Hayes Public Service Award . . . for its provision of meals using fresh, local and organic ingredients delivered, prepared and served within a day.</p> <p>The Sustainable Consumption Round Table publishes <i>Double dividend?</i>, a report (written by the Soil Association and Cardiff University) calling on Government and the School Food Trust to place a special priority on sustainable food sourcing for schools.</p> |
|  <p>In response to a Soil Association delegation of dissatisfied pupils, Stephen Twigg, Schools Minister, confirms he will examine why unhealthy products are still being served to English school children but restates his Government's ideological resistance to greater central funding for school meals.</p>  <p>Two parents form Let's Do Lunch at Lethbridge School, Swindon and begin serving meals that conform to FFL standards. Within two weeks uptake jumps fivefold to 250 meals a day.</p> <p>Soil Association wins two grants from Defra to kick off FFL pilot projects with school meal providers in the West Midlands and South West England.</p> | <p>Soil Association launches the Best School Dinner Awards.</p> <p>Also publishes new research showing how English/Welsh primary school menus which comply with Government standards routinely contain significantly higher levels of fat, sugar and salt than recommended by nutritionists.</p>  <p>Business in the Community's Rural Action Campaign and the Soil Association publish <i>Looking for Innovation in Healthy School Meals</i>, a report showing how pupils with access to drinking water and who eat meals made with fresh unprocessed ingredients have better concentration, less absence, better learning capacity and lower rates of hyperactivity.</p> <p>Peter Melchett and Lizzie Vann have a further meeting with DfES; the letter of support from the catering companies has left DfES unmoved.</p> |  <p>In January Soil Association Policy Director Peter Melchett, Jeanette Orrey and Lizzie Vann attend another meeting at No 10 Downing Street. No 10 invites senior officials from DfES, the FSA and Department of Health to attend.</p> <p>As revealed by contradictory wording on school meals in the Public Health White Paper, there are now clear divisions within the Government on school meals, and growing concern about the impact of Jamie Oliver's TV series.</p> <p>Peter Melchett meets DfES advisors and is assured no new money can be made available for school meals.</p> | <p>Soil Association survey results show a postcode lottery for decent school food. The results clearly show the vital need for more money to be spent on food ingredients by almost every LEA.</p> <p>In a letter to Ruth Kelly (Education Secretary) nearly 50 eminent academics, led by Tim Lang, Professor of Food Policy at City University, with the Soil Association and other experts, urge her to adopt the Caroline Walker Trust's quantified nutritional standards for school meals immediately.</p> <p>Peter Melchett meets advisors in No 10, stressing the Soil Association's priorities for reform: new nutritional standards and more money for school meals.</p> |  <p><i>The Dinner Lady</i> – a book about good school food by Jeanette Orrey (former school cook and Soil Association's School Meals Policy Advisor) goes straight to number 3 in the non-fiction bestseller lists.</p> | <p>HRH The Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Rothesay visit Hurlford Primary School, Scotland, a <i>Food for Life</i> school</p>  <p><i>Food for Life</i> educational workshops delivered in 100 schools.</p> <p>Peter Melchett, Soil Association Policy Director, joins a wide range of stakeholders participating in the independent School Meals Review Panel which meets for the first time in May.</p> |  <p>The Soil Association and <i>The Guardian</i> hold a FFL conference for parent school food activists in London. 75 attend.</p> <p>Soil Association's School Food Award presented by Jamie Oliver has nine times the number of applicants than the previous year.</p> | <p>Soil Association publishes research showing Government testing found over 25% more pesticides in samples of fruit and vegetables supplied to school children, under its official School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme (SFVS), than in samples of the same fruit and vegetables on sale in shops.</p> |  <p>Jamie Oliver opens The Training Kitchen at Ashlyns (Soil Association certified) Organic Farm, Essex. This project, a partnership between the farm and Jeanette Orrey, aims to inspire and empower school cooks to return to real cooking with fresh and organic produce.</p> |





Diane Rawlinson and Susie Beager, catering manager and cook at Oakview Special School in Essex, are intensely satisfied when the children they serve ask for more of the healthy meals developed under *Food for Life*

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“The health advantages of well-cooked, well-presented meals, made from good-quality ingredients to accepted nutritional standards, by school caterers who are confident in their skills and valued by the school community, are inestimable.”

Turning the Tables, Transforming School Food, School Meals Review Panel, October 2005

¹⁹ *Turning the Tables, Transforming School Food, School Meals Review Panel, October 2005*

²⁰ Pearce H., Green M. and Noble E., Soil Association and Cardiff University (2005): *Double dividend? Promoting good nutrition and sustainable consumption through healthy school meals*, Sustainable Consumption Roundtable

As the name of their report suggests, in October 2005, after a few intensive months of discussion, the School Meals Review Panel (SMRP) made far-reaching recommendations to the Department of Education and Skills concerning how to utilise “the best opportunity to upgrade the quality of school food since regulations were removed in 1980.”¹⁹

At its core the SMRP recommends the Caroline Walker Trust guidelines on minimum nutrient content for school meals. Adding to these it calls for nine further food standards to be made mandatory for schools. These recommendations are designed to ensure that primary and secondary children have maximum exposure to healthier foods (like fruit, vegetables and brown bread). They will also ban, in effect, the provision of convenience foods, confectionery, pre-packaged savoury snacks and high-sugar or sweetened fizzy drinks in schools.

The Panel also noted in the report that it “repeatedly heard head teachers and others from schools where food had already been improved speak of associated improvements in behaviour: of calmer, better behaved children, more ready to learn.”

In summary, the SMRP’s advice to ministers gives formal weight to a set of basic improvements – such as staff training, the whole school approach to healthy eating, better quality ingredients, and seasonal menu planning – that has been widely advocated and tested by many different groups.

The Department of Education has welcomed the SMRP report and is now expected to make the nutritional guidelines advocated by the panel

compulsory from 2008 for primary schools and 2009 for secondary schools.

What about sustainability?

The School Meals Review Panel also called on the Government to address the sustainability issues that arise from school food procurement. In a clear recommendation that “the aspiration for school lunches should be a hot meal, cooked on the premises from fresh and seasonal ingredients” the Panel echoes a key tenet of the *Food for Life* approach that there is “huge scope for linking sustainable food procurement with improved education for children about where food comes from”.

Further support for this approach is also found in the Sustainable Consumption Roundtable’s (SCR) recent *Double dividend?* report (commissioned by SCR from the Soil Association).²⁰ Amongst other things this emphasises that the School Meals Trust will need to ensure that its programme of work will drive the delivery of the new nutritional standards for school meals and the Government’s wider public sector sustainable procurement initiative as one *single agenda*.

To that end the Roundtable suggests the top priorities for the new school meals standards and the School Food Trust must be to require a shift

- Towards one portion of seasonal local, organic fruit and vegetables every day, aiming to increase the proportion of local organic food over time.
- Towards better quality meat consumed in lower quantities and organic milk.
- Away from white fish towards

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oily fish sourced from accredited sustainable fisheries.

The Soil Association supports all of these points and the analysis that greater use of more seasonal menus is of key importance. This, coupled with local sourcing of organic food (where possible), down shorter supply chains, offers the most cost effective and sustainable means by which schools can replace over-processed meal elements of poor nutritional value with fresher, less processed ingredients. Not only is the food of better quality, it also incurs much lower environmental costs.

Does Government funding go far enough?

The SMRP estimates that the additional cost to local authorities, schools, parents and carers of implementing its recommendations over a three-year transition period will be around £167m in the first year and £159m in subsequent years, totalling £485m.

These estimates are far greater than the £220 million over three years pledged in March this year by DfES to raise the minimum ingredient spend (to 50p per head for primary and 60p for secondary) and to support the transformation of school meals by local authorities.

Going further still, the Panel also emphasises that “over two-thirds of these estimated additional costs will go towards food on the plate to bring expenditure on ingredients into line with the Caroline Walker Trust (CWT) recommendations”.

In its revised guidelines published in June, CWT advocates a spend of 70p per meal for each primary school child

and 80p for secondary students on ingredients as the minimum required on nutritional grounds alone.

The Soil Association supports that argument but, in line with the recommendations of the Sustainable Consumption Roundtable, would add that the same expenditure could deliver a double (health and environmental) dividend if adequate priority were placed upon improving freshness and cutting environmental impacts throughout the supply chain.

Spending sustainably

To deliver a sustainable school meals service the Government needs to set targets for schools. Improvements in nutrition *and* the sustainability of their supply chains through greater use of seasonal, fresh, local and organic produce should be measured and targeted for improvements. To support this it needs to continue disseminating best practice and expertise in sustainable procurement amongst those involved in large scale public sector food purchasing.

The Big Lottery Fund could fund head teacher efforts to take children on farm visits, to establish cookery classes and to set up long term growing projects within their schools where children and their parents take part. Parental support needs to be won and maintained if healthy eating, higher uptake of healthy school meals and benefits to the wider community are to last.

Above and beyond all of that, it is imperative that the Government ensures the Audit Commission develops an effective costing framework for measuring ‘Best Value’ in sustainable school



meal provision. One that is not driven principally by cost. This methodology must be designed to give accurate and transparent consideration to the environmental, health and economic benefits arising from meals made predominantly with high-quality local and organic ingredients that are delivered, prepared and served within a day.



In summary

Ministers have been given robust, detailed and far-reaching advice about the best way forward to secure improvements in school meal provision across England. The ambition and imagination they now show in their detailed implementation of school meal reform will be a litmus test for this Government's commitment to public health, education and sustainable consumption.



Children enjoying a fresh-cooked wholesome lunch at St Peter's Primary in Nottinghamshire



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Over the past two years, the Soil Association has worked with around 500 schools and ten local authorities keen to use the *Food for Life* targets to implement changes to school meals. This experience, and that of other groups working on a similar agenda, has highlighted a string of important lessons about what will support or hinder the transformation of school meal provision in England and Wales.

Scrutiny and transparency – two fundamentals

In March 2005 the Soil Association compiled league tables for what is spent around the country on school meal ingredients. The results of this exercise suggested the priority paid to school meals and the quality of food offered to children varies widely. It is little short of a postcode lottery. This, and the plethora of enquiries to the *Food for Life* helpline from frustrated parents, also highlights how far a culture of lack of knowledge, non-disclosure and misinformation continues to shroud the fragmented pattern of school meal provision in England and Wales. However the new standards for school meals in England should make it easier for parents to know what their children are eating at school.

Change is made much more likely where parents, heads and governors make it their business to scrutinise what their caterer is serving on a daily basis. Various groups have shown how establishing themselves as robust clients deserving of a transparent, well managed service leads to action. Such efforts are particularly important where food is provided under a long-term agreement between a LEA and a contractor. Cheap

and unhealthy meals are commonly the product of weak service specifications. Often health priorities are placed well below those of ‘least cost’ in these non-transparent, difficult-to-police contracts.

As the ‘Ninja Mums’ of St Paul’s primary school in the north London Borough of Camden found in 2004, their borough-wide catering contractor Scolarest refused persistently to reveal who supplied the meat served to their children or where it came from. Eventually, they broke in to investigate the school kitchen for themselves only to discover stocks of Thai chicken banned by the EU following an outbreak of Asian bird flu.

Down the road in Islington, Wendy Meredith, the head at Hargrave Park community primary also challenged Scolarest – in her case to replace frozen and processed foods with fresh ingredients and home cooked recipes. Having won the changes she wanted she then shared her strategy with other local heads and governors to help start a discussion that more or less forced the local authority to impose an improvement programme on the contractor sufficient to address a raft of ‘delivery failures’ in local schools.

Over in southwest London, Merton Parents for Better Food in Schools have also shown how the fastest way to secure improvement is through ruthless public scrutiny. By posting digital images of the dismal food dished up to their children daily by Initial Catering on a colourful website they won national media attention for their concerns. Several headlines and a few months later they won an invitation, in November 2005

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to meet with local authority managers and the contractor to devise a three year improvement plan that will include the use of some organic ingredients.

Cooks and catering managers are key to the ‘whole school approach’

In every *Food for Life* school it is an article of faith that cooks and dining assistants should enjoy the same respect shown to their teaching colleagues. As Jeanette Orrey often remarks “it is fundamental to an effective ‘whole school approach’ that heads ensure, as mine did, that their dinner ladies arrive and leave the school premises just like the children and teaching staff do – through the front door of the school.”

Such issues stretch well beyond the symbolic. Schools that empower their kitchen teams tend to make more effort to train them because, like *Food for Life* award winner Southdown primary in Bath, they recognise how closely a healthy school food culture depends on ensuring these staff possess the competence to design seasonal menus and the time to develop a good working knowledge of fresh foods available from a range of local suppliers.

In Bath and North East Somerset, the cooks from each of nine schools participating in a *Food for Life* pilot project recently went with their dining assistants and a clutch of local authority managers to a local organic farm for a one day workshop, organised by the Soil Association, to discover more about using organic ingredients. Many practical changes unfolded from this experience:

- The farmer explored opportunities for expanding his market for ‘wonky’



carrots and other ‘cosmetically challenged’ vegetables

- Managers went home with a raft of new ideas for affordable menu improvements
- Cooks went home with a thorough understanding of how, within the constraints of their kitchens, they might use more ‘in season’ produce to expand the range of vegetables the children eat
- Dining assistants came away more familiar with where the food they would be serving came from and far more confidence about explaining its benefits.

Working to replicate that awareness among a much larger number of catering professionals, the Training Kitchen at Ashlyns Farm in Essex has been established. The purpose of this training is to ensure that school cooks and local authority catering managers can reconnect with where healthy fresh food comes from and know how to cook it.

Vision matters as much as investment

Far too many schools face a considerable challenge if they are to overcome the legacy of public policy failure that has left them without adequate kitchen or dining facilities. While carefully targeted investment by Government to address these problems is essential, money is not the only ingredient required to deliver lasting beneficial change. Schools also need vision and courage.

At Millfields Community School in Hackney head teacher Anna Hassan jumped at the opportunity to improve school meals, created by the collapse of the Initial area-wide contract. In 2002 she started to work with Eagle Solutions, a local catering consultancy, to develop a healthy stand-alone food service.

Early changes involved ensuring cooks could work with the equipment, giving children china plates and metal cutlery, and allowing them to converse in a family environment. One year after contractors walked away, Millfields replaced seven separate energy-wasting fridges with a purpose built walk-in cold room. A year later it also rebuilt and refitted its kitchen. It used a loan (paid off by the end of the 2004–5 school year) and money raised from meals sold:

- at lunchtime (to children and staff)
- to the out-of-hours play centre
- to the school's popular breakfast club, and
- to an accelerated learning club for around 100 children that meets in the school every Saturday.

Several secondary schools have also shown that similar changes are well within their

reach. St Aidan's in Harrogate, a large comprehensive, set out six years ago (and well before *Food for Life*) to raise the standard of its food provision as part of its 'whole school approach' to health and wellbeing. To bring a higher level of skill, expertise and expectation to their catering team the governing body of this school opted to hire a chef with 25 years experience in the hotel and restaurant trade to work on site. They also took out a loan of £250,000 from the LEA (repaid over five years through general school funds) and raised a further £250,000 from a variety of sources to build a new kitchen, an elegant cafeteria and a spacious new dining hall with ample seating where over 90% of students now hone their social skills over a healthy lunch.

Quality and participation transforms uptake

In the past 18 months the experience gained by organisations implementing change in Hull, Glasgow and Greenwich has highlighted the problems that can arise when speedy menu changes are imposed without enough practical involvement from children and their parents. As catering specialist Kemi Atijosan of Eagle Solutions says, "You can make any changes to school meals that you want, but the only way to get children to eat it is through the whole school approach. If there is no food education for children and for their parents, then you can forget it."

As a matter of principle *Food for Life* schools are asked to ensure full participation of parents and children in menu development – both through practical events or workshops such

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Uptake rates in a sample of *Food for Life* Schools

| School | Spend on Ingredients (p) | Cost of Meal (£) | Uptake (%) |
|--|--------------------------|------------------|------------|
| All Saints Primary School, Ilkely | 70 | 1.60 | 79 |
| Lethbridge Primary School, Wiltshire | 80 | 2.00 | 60 |
| Mornington Primary School, Notts | 85 | 1.59 | 65 |
| Southdown Infants School, Bath | 75 | 1.50 | 80 |
| St Peters Primary School, Notts | 70 | 1.75 | 83 |
| East Ayrshire (11 schools in FFL pilot) | 75 | 1.48 | 68 |
| Thomas Fairchild Community School, Hackney | 67 | 1.60 | 90 |

as food tastings and through specific activities linked into the curriculum. It is no accident therefore that *Food for Life* schools have shown *without exception* that uptake rates for school meals improve dramatically when children design menus they want to eat and parents acquire more confidence in the quality of the food on offer.

The most striking example of this has probably been Lethbridge primary school in Swindon where the local council were considering closing the kitchen in December 2003 after uptake levels for its highly-processed meals fell to around 10% of the school roll. Nine months later two enterprising parents began serving home-cooked food made from scratch that exceeded *Food for Life* targets for quality fresh, local and organic ingredients. Meal numbers jumped within a fortnight from a base line of 40 to around 220 a day. Fifteen months later they had reached 300 meals a day. 'Let's Do Lunch' had expanded to deliver a similar transformation for as many as 1300 children every day in three more Swindon primary schools.

The proof is in the eating

Designing healthier menus and serving better food is not enough on its own. Schools must also deliver engaging and practical food education sufficient to explain to the next generation not just why healthy food choices will improve their long-term health but also why their choices today will help determine the future sustainability of the food system. A partnership between caterers and educators about food is fundamental to ensure that children will engage with and eat healthier food.

At Columbia Primary in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, head teacher Penny Bentley began looking in 2002 for ways to improve the food eaten at lunch by around 70% of the school. Following a decision to provide free fruit to all children every day and efforts to persuade the catering contractor to improve the quantity and quality of salad on offer at lunch, Bentley began running special assemblies, set aside lesson time devoted to healthy eating and made sure a member of the teaching staff was on duty every day at

the salad bar to encourage all the pupils to eat some salad with their meal.

Expanding their commitment to food education, Columbia School now holds a healthy eating week every year. The entire curriculum in every classroom is turned over to subjects such as cookery, where food comes from and how to eat well. Year four pupils also go on farm visits to Ashlyns Organic Farm in nearby Ongar. In addition, parent and dietician Marjon Willers has set up a vegetable stall in the school playground once a week that now sells fixed-priced bags of seasonal organic vegetables at an affordable price to over 40 families.

Over time these efforts have provoked a further shift in the school dining hall where all the fruit and salads are now organic. As kitchen manager Afusat Ibrahim points out, the very noticeable improvement this has delivered in both quality and taste is closely reflected in the choices made by the children, some 60% of whom now choose salad *by preference*. “Overall, our children not only eat more salad than cooked vegetables now, but they also consume a great deal more organic salad than they ever did of the conventional variety.”

Better food improves behaviour and attainment

Two years ago a dearth of scientific evidence made it difficult for the Soil Association to explain in the *Food for Life* report why better school food would improve behaviour in the classroom and deliver better learning outcomes. Within a month however, leading scientist and broadcaster Lord Winston drew the nation’s attention

to new evidence concerning the links between the supply of key nutrients in children’s diets and their capacity to learn enough to fulfill their potential.²¹

While the scientific evidence to back up the links between sound nutrition, good behaviour and educational performance remains worryingly meagre, the anecdotal evidence continues to accumulate. So much so that it would be a nonsense for schools or local authorities to ignore the potential value of an excellent universal food service. As the independent School Meals Review Panel stated in its recent report “the Panel repeatedly heard head teachers and others from schools where food had already been improved speak of associated improvements in behaviour: of calmer, better behaved children, more ready to learn. Improving food in schools may contribute to improved attainment and behaviour.”²²

Local sourcing makes the best use of public money

A handful of pioneering local authorities and *Food for Life* schools consistently show that sourcing seasonal ingredients from local suppliers provides the most cost effective method to replace poor quality food which has travelled long distances from unknown destinations.

One award winning example from the Scottish local authority of East Ayrshire is detailed in the next section. Another is Let’s Do Lunch, the company which uses over 80% local and organic ingredients for school meals in Swindon. One of the strongest other examples of cost-effective local sourcing to date is the work undertaken by Educational Catering Services (ECS) in Bradford.

²¹ Pearce H., Green M. and Noble E., Soil Association and Cardiff University (2005): *Double dividend? Promoting good nutrition and sustainable consumption through healthy school meals*, Sustainable Consumption Roundtable

²² *Turning the Tables, Transforming School Food*, School Meals Review Panel, October 2005

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Here operations manager Roger Sheard has led a programme to improve meal ingredient quality at no extra cost through:

- using less processed food
- designing better product specifications
- using seasonal produce
- fresher local butchery
- less packaging and
- simpler delivery arrangements.

By cutting back on extended supply chains, ECS has been able to redirect money into local food spending that was previously ‘lost’ to intermediaries and wholesalers. Five years down the line, most of the food ingredients used by ECS to supply 50,000 school meals a day are now sourced locally, including fruit, vegetables, multigrain breads, free range eggs, fresh meat and poultry. The only thing that hasn’t changed is the price. Bradford primary school meals remain second cheapest (£1.20 per day) in the UK with an average ingredient spend of around 60 pence per meal.

Food for Life delivers a double dividend

In 2001 Kay Knight, the contracts manager for South Gloucestershire Council Catering and Contract Services realised that she would do a great deal for the planet, for local farmers and for the health of her clients if she could reform her school food supply chains. More specifically, she (and her political masters) had the wit to appreciate that, managed side by side, the delivery of healthy nutritious food in schools and the development of sustainable local supply chains (in line with Government policy on public procurement) match so

closely it is possible to realise a double health and environmental dividend.

In a similar vein, catering professionals in East Ayrshire and in Shropshire have found that the *Food for Life* model offers them and their colleagues across many areas of local Government and service delivery an effective and proven framework within which they can talk the same language and work together more effectively to address health/educational and environmental issues in parallel.

The strong links between nutrition and sustainability are the focus for a separate and detailed report published recently by the Sustainable Consumption Roundtable (SCR). It examines in detail the ‘double dividend’ to be reaped from the provision of healthy, nutritious school meals using meat, dairy, fish and vegetable produce from local and sustainable production systems.²³

What that report makes plain is how far the UK remains behind several other European nations when it comes to best practice in the development of sustainable school meal provision. To see really joined up practice on this agenda one must travel to Rome where, three years ago, the local Government set in motion a programme to improve the educational, nutritional and cultural value of school meals across the city. Under this programme 140,000 predominantly organic three course school meals are now served every day to Roman school children, including special recipes for 4,000 with dietary restrictions for health or religious reasons. Seasonality, weekly specials and traditional or local recipes are central to menus that change weekly and shift in style for summer and winter.

“The Food for Life targets were a conversation starter, it helped get the right people around the table and led to a set of actions which have created change”

Angie Turner
Shropshire
County Council

²³ Pearce H., Green M. and Noble E., Soil Association and Cardiff University (2005): *Double dividend? Promoting good nutrition and sustainable consumption through healthy school meals*, Sustainable Consumption Roundtable

Changes to the meal provision are rooted in a wider education programme called “Cultura che Nutre” (Culture that Feeds). It is part of a deliberate Government-funded strategy to invest 166m Euros over three years (2004–2007) to cut chemical residues in children’s diets, improve dining hall layouts and keep meal prices at 2 Euros for all families (and less for those on low incomes).

Passionate leadership and innovative partnerships – the key hidden ingredients

Question school heads or catering professionals engaged with *Food for Life* closely enough and two striking similarities will always surface: one is a passionate belief that every child deserves healthy food and a sound understanding about where it comes from. The other is an ability to think outside the box and to reach beyond convention to establish new and innovative partnerships in school food sourcing.

Without a kitchen, Landscope Primary School in south Devon was unsure how it might replace the tired fare shipped in from a kitchen five miles away for a very small number of pupils by Devon County Services. It struck gold, however, when it joined forces with former parent Guy Watson of Riverford Organics, the UK’s largest independent producer of organic vegetables. Guy was keen to use his new field kitchen just a mile down the road to offer a local and healthy alternative. Today, under a tightly specified contract, lunches prepared at the farm kitchen and delivered to the school are made from a minimum of 95% organic ingredients for the very fair price of £1.50 per child

per day. As school head Robin Smith says, “nearly every parent thought the new meals were a very good idea.”

Interesting work is happening on a larger scale too. Bill Campbell, operations manager for Shropshire’s shire services and Angie Turner, Shropshire County Council’s sustainability officer brought together a range of partners²⁴ to establish a project which aims to raise consumption of fresh, seasonal and organic food in local schools. Using the *Food for Life* framework the partnership:

- Reviewed the menus bringing them nearer to the Caroline Walker Trust standards.
- Encouraged the use of more seasonal, fresh, local and organic ingredients by enabling some schools to source directly from farmers and farm shops through pilots.
- Reviewed all the tender specifications for food to include clauses that require contractors to curb the environmental impacts (e.g. waste, emissions) from the service they provide.
- Set up a school cooks group to discuss and implement change.

As a result of all this work the council is in position to more easily adopt the recommendations of the School Meals Review Panel and integrate sustainability and food education into the heart of their school meals service.

Rigorous business planning and sustainable performance measurement – two missing ingredients

To date, very few LEAs have properly integrated improvement of school meals services in their business planning

²⁴ This partnership consists of Shropshire Rural Hub, the food and farming team from Advantage West Midlands, the Soil Association, Heart of England Fine Foods, the NFU and a range of education and school meals service staff within Shropshire County Council.

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2003–2005: lessons for a new century

objectives for the next three years. This lack of rigorous foresight partly reflects:

- The complete absence of Government guidance to schools or LEAs on this matter
- The very limited information available about the current state of school kitchens and meal provision
- The reality that the Government has set no Best Value Performance Indicators for public sector catering
- The Audit Commission has no methodology for measuring 'Best Value' in school meal contracts, giving adequate and meaningful weight to key sustainability impacts (e.g. climate, biodiversity, water, waste and the local economy).

Cutting costs where school food is concerned cannot deliver sustainable healthy meals. Best value performance measures must incorporate health, environmental and educational targets if they are to promote and support lasting change.



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2006: A gold standard for all – the *Food for Life Mark*

What began as a pilot project for less than half a dozen schools has expanded to include over 500 schools and 10 local authorities aiming to implement *Food for Life* – or elements of it. From among these, two initiatives stand out as the best exemplars of where the programme is heading three years after its inception. One of these is the story of Feeding the Future, the *Food for Life* flagship project underway at Ashlyns Organic Farm near Ongar in Essex. The other is the tale of East Ayrshire's award winning efforts to build the UK's first organic school meals service.

East Ayrshire – A flagship Food for Life service in the making

In August 2004 East Ayrshire started a quiet revolution in Scottish school meal procurement. It established a pilot project at Hurlford primary school near Kilmarnock providing meals prepared using high quality fresh, local and organic foods that are delivered, cooked and served within a day. These were to comply with the Soil Association's *Food for Life* targets.

With support from Pam Rodway, Co-ordinator of *Food for Life* for Soil Association Scotland, and Wendy Barrie, a local food and nutrition specialist new seasonal menus were developed. They made the most of local fresh produce while featuring Mediterranean, Scottish and international cuisine with plenty of fish and no processed foods high in fat, sugar or salt.

By the end of the pilot in July 2005, the school kitchen at Hurlford had significantly exceeded the *Food for Life* targets. Over 50% of the food served

was organic including fruit, vegetables, milk, flour, pulses and brown rice. Some 70% was of local origin including bread, farmhouse cheese, free-range red meat, chicken and eggs. More than 90% of all the meals on the menu were made from scratch using entirely unprocessed raw ingredients.

Despite a very modest price rise (to £1.48), school meal uptake levels rose by around 10% at Hurlford (to 68%) by the end of the pilot, bucking a national trend where school meal uptake across Scotland fell over the same period by an average of 2%. Confounding expectations, labour overheads did not rise although ingredient spend rose by 20% to support the more nutritious menus. Building on this success, from May 2005 the pilot expanded to take in a diverse group of ten more schools from across the whole local authority. Eventually it is intended that the same changes will be extended to all schools in East Ayrshire.

By setting out to follow a *Food for Life* approach, Project Manager Robin Gourlay was fully aware that he was committing his council's procurement team to establishing a web of relationships with a number of different local (organic and non-organic) producers. Much of the food purchased for the single pilot school was not sourced competitively, but all of the food going into the 11 schools under the expanded pilot is now purchased under a series of competitive contracts structured to permit the participation of smaller local businesses. Contracts are awarded against the following criteria:

- the most economically advantageous tender (50%)

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- ability to supply to deadlines (15%)
- quality and range of foods (15%)
- food handling arrangements and facilities (10%) and
- use of resources (10%).

For Gourlay and his colleagues, the *Food for Life* model has delivered a huge environmental dividend in the form of a 70% overall reduction in food miles. 12 out of 15 products on the *Food for Life* menu are sourced within 40 miles, compared to only 3 products on the standard menu, and the average distance travelled per menu item fell from 330 miles in the standard menu to 99 miles in the *Food for Life* menu.

Gourlay also maintains that his new more local supply chains are considerably simpler, more transparent and accountable than those his team previously relied on. “Rather than paying for food miles or the profit margins of conglomerates we have been able to spend more in the local economy. In the process we have also won the additional freedom to stipulate what

amounts to far less processed and much fresher food,” he says.

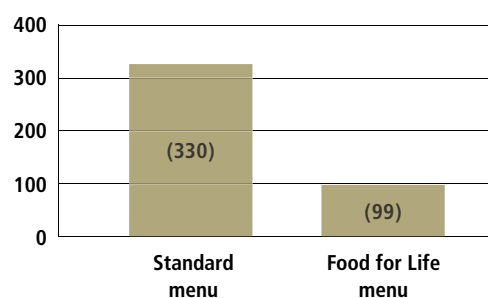
Feeding Our Future at Ashlyns Organic Farm – supporting transformation in Essex schools

Ashlyns Farm, near Ongar in Essex, is home to many different organic enterprises including a farm shop and box delivery scheme. As part of the Soil Association organic farm network Ashlyns also hosts visits from over 50 school groups a year. But for Jim Collins and Gary Stokes, it was the arrival of their own young children that made them think about supplying food to local schools. Early market research highlighted two key obstacles:

- A training facility was required where school cooks could gain the confidence they would need to handle fresh meat and produce for large numbers.
- Small local organic producers also needed to develop a shared collection facility if they were to minimise the otherwise costly overheads involved in regular deliveries to multiple sites.

Responding to that challenge, Ashlyns applied for a grant from DEFRA’s rural enterprise scheme. This would fund the creation of an eastern region food producers co-operative to supply schools and establish a preparation/training kitchen at the farm. By that stage Ruth Watts, the catering manager for Barking Abbey secondary school (a specialist sports academy keen to improve the meals it serves as part of a ‘whole school approach’ to healthy lifestyles) had already asked Ashlyns to supply fresh organic produce at prices

Figure 1
Average distance travelled per menu item in East Ayrshire schools (miles)



Figures include 14 menu items which can be produced locally.

Source: East Ayrshire Council, 2005

competitive with those charged for conventional fare by her local wholesaler.

Around the same time, Essex County Council opted to delegate responsibility and the budget for school meal provision to all of its primary schools. Some heads and governing bodies simply did not want to develop an in-house service but within a year at least ten local primaries were buying local meat and fresh organic produce from Ashlyns.

Today Feeding our Future has grown into a flagship project for the *Food for Life* programme. It offers training, consultancy services and local sourcing support to local school kitchens.²⁵ Jeanette Orrey leads workshops for heads or catering managers that explain budgets, menus and the whole school approach whilst highlighting the curricular issues addressed under a *Food for Life* approach. The training kitchen also provides two or three day courses for any school cook wanting to learn more. Everything from practical cooking with fresh ingredients to budgeting, sourcing local produce and menu design to meet nutritional standards can be taught. For schools that want to deliver to the *Food for Life* targets, Feeding our Future also provides consultancy support. This helps schools to provide food that children want to eat. As part of the service catering staff can:

- access their own weekly menus via the web
- key in their head counts
- generate bespoke order lists and amend them to reflect whatever stock they still hold.

To monitor the sustainability of the food provided more closely, the same system

is also designed to make it possible to calculate the distance produce has travelled between suppliers and the schools via the distribution hub established at the farm. In one further twist, farm and teaching staff can use the same laptop facilities as a resource in the classroom.

At Oak View Special School in Essex catering manager Diane Rawlinson is proud to have gone organic. "The children are getting a proper meal – we saw a difference in them within six weeks," she says. It all started with a phone call to Ashlyns where Jeanette Orrey was able to provide head teacher, Steve Armstrong, with all the information he required on budgets, menus and the whole school approach to healthy eating. Using vegetables from the farm and fully traceable meat sourced by Ashlyns from local suppliers, a three-week cycle of new menus was designed that would comply with *Food for Life* targets. After three days of training with Jeanette the dinner ladies went home confident they could cook the new meals from scratch.

The children not only ate every scrap they provided but eagerly asked for more. *Food for Life* food takes longer to prepare but delivers much greater job satisfaction, says assistant cook Susie Beager. "We don't mind hard work . . . the food is marvellous and we love seeing the kids eat it." Like any other school that works to *Food for Life* standards, all the Oak View children get a nutritionally-balanced home cooked meal every day. They also get a top quality education in food culture, including what good food tastes like and where it comes from through farm visits and practical activities.

²⁵ For further information, please contact Gary Stokes at gary@ashlyns.co.uk or phone on 01277 890821

Matthew, who attends Oak View Special School, says with a grin "I eat everything here!"



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Maintaining momentum – the *Food for Life Mark*

Both the flagship projects detailed in the previous section inspire sustainable change by creating a positive food culture amongst their participant school communities. Neither of these projects will be enough, however, in themselves to secure a lasting revolution in school food provision across the nation as a whole. Rather, the ‘gold standard’ they have helped to refine will be used to provide the basis for an independently accredited model that can be replicated elsewhere – the *Food for Life Mark*.

Focus on Food:

Through their Cooking Bus programme Focus on Food equip children and teachers, education and health professionals with essential cooking skills that are linked to the school curriculum. The Focus on Food Cooking Bus fleet currently consists of three vehicles funded by the Food Standards Agency, Yorkshire Forward and Waitrose respectively. There is a substantial waiting list for the Cooking Buses’ practical food education workshops.

Garden Organic:

(formerly the Henry Doubleday Research Association) runs an Organic Gardening for Schools programme, sponsored by Duchy Originals, with over 1600 schools participating across the UK by the end of 2005. The project supports schools to grow vegetables in their schools grounds, and undertake associated class room activities as part of the national curriculum. The view of Garden Organic is that there is an excitement for children in growing their own food – and that once they have grown it, they are

much more keen to taste it. So the gardening aspect of understanding vegetables becomes a key part in choosing a healthy diet.
www.gardenorganic.org.uk

The *Food for Life Mark* has been developed in partnership with Focus on Food, the Health Education Trust and Garden Organic. Building on this expertise and the lessons learnt from *Food for Life*, the mark will provide a guided process so schools can successfully improve their meals and food culture to a truly ‘Gold Standard’. The mark is aimed at both primary and secondary schools throughout the UK.

Recognised and trusted as a standard of quality by schools the *Food for Life Mark* will enable parents, teachers, governors, Ofsted and health professionals to trust that the school’s food, food education and school food culture are of the highest quality and give its students the best possible understanding of good and healthy food.

The *Food for Life Mark* will encompass all the existing requirements with regard to school food, such as the new food and nutritional standards, but also integrate the *Food for Life* targets and the whole school approach.

One of the additional measures required of schools obtaining the *Food for Life Mark* will be the attention to food culture in school and food education. Schools will ensure all pupils experience how to cook and how to grow vegetables. All pupils will visit a working farm, city farm or allotments, ideally a farm supplying the school. The mark will also ensure that catering staff will be an integral and valued part of the school.

Making the *Food for Life Mark* work

The *Food for Life Mark* will guide schools through a four stage circular process of continuous improvement.

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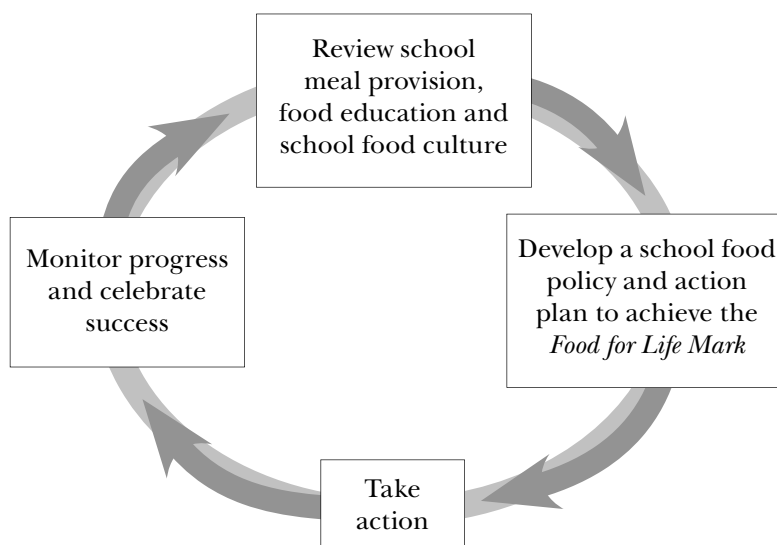
Maintaining momentum – the *Food for Life Mark*

Schools will be asked to demonstrate progress against five designated target areas defined to encourage the whole school approach, food education and food culture.

- School leadership and vision on school food and food culture.
- Food quality, nutrition and sourcing
- Food education – growing, farming, cooking and healthy eating.
- Dining room environment and kitchen facilities.
- Working with the whole school and the wider community.

As a quality assurance standard the *Food for Life Mark* will help parents to choose schools which have a strong food culture, where meals can be trusted and enjoyed and where their children will be given a robust food education based on effective classroom learning and practical activities. These will include farm visits, growing projects and learning to cook.

The Soil Association is working with schools and caterers in England and Scotland to begin to implement the *Food for Life Mark*. For more information about the *Food for Life Mark* or to register your school please visit www.soilassociation.org/foodforlife/mark



Child Poverty Action Group: CPAG is the leading charity campaigning for the abolition of poverty among children and young people in the UK and for the improvement of the lives of low-income families. It recently wrote *Recipe for Change*, which brings together examples of individual initiatives from around the UK that have significantly improved the quality and take-up of school meals. www.cpag.org.uk

Health Education Trust: the Trust promotes the development of health education for young people in the UK. The charity originated the concept of 'whole school' approaches to food and nutrition policy via the creation of School Nutrition Action Groups (SNAGs), which are school alliances in which staff, pupils and caterers, supported by health and education professionals, work together to review and expand the range of food and drink available in school. The Trust is also acknowledged as the pioneer of healthy vending in schools. www.healtheducationtrust.com

Soil Association Organic Farm Network: a network of over 80 organic farms open to the public across Britain. In 2004 over 400,000 visitors, including many schools, visited farms in the network. The farms enable children, families and schools to experience a real and working organic farm and see how food is produced. www.soilassociation.org

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The Soil Association wishes to thank all the staff and individuals who have contributed to *Food for Life*.

More please!



Food for Life action pack

Price £6.00

The action pack shows parents and teachers how they can start to make changes to the food that is served in their schools. The pack contains information on:

- Taking control of your school meal service
- How to make practical changes
- How to source fresh local and organic produce
- Menus from schools using the Food for Life targets
- New Government guidelines on nutrition and school meals
- Soil Association resources for schools.

Place your order

To order a copy, call the Soil Association on 0117 314 5180. To download a copy visit www.soilassociation.org/foodforlife

A 50 per cent discount on both publications is available to members of the Soil Association.

Food for Life educational materials linked with the national curriculum can be downloaded free of charge from www.soilassociation.org/education



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The Soil Association has distributed over 7,000 action packs and 3,000 Education Curriculum packs and has worked with over 500 schools across ten local authorities.