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Brexit: An opportunity for the UK to give more priority to nutrition related health in agricultural policy?

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Introduction

The Brexit vote could be said to be one of the most significant public votes of the 21st century. The effect on agricultural policy could be immense, with the impact reverberating further than the farm gate. This is at a time when global food systems are under intense pressure from the challenges of population increase, demographic change, resource scarcity, food inequality, diet related disease and climate change. These challenges have spawned concerns relating to food security and sustainability (Lang and Barling, 2012). Consequently, post-Brexit it is essential that the United Kingdom (UK) develops a strong agricultural policy that can ensure sustainable food security. Garnett (2013) highlights that the food system is a complex multi-stakeholder field and so the development of post-Brexit policy is likely to be fraught with difficulty. The most powerful policy influencers will be reluctant to alter the established and ingrained political agenda, but they must be persuaded that in the interests of achieving sustainable food security, nutrition related health problems should be given more priority in agricultural policy (Hawkesworth *et al.*, 2010; Sonnino *et al.*, 2014; Lang and Heasman, 2016).

The following section begins by giving a brief contextual history of the European Common Agricultural Policy (EU CAP), followed by a summary of the

latest 2013 reforms. It is then argued that whilst environmental considerations have been integrated into the CAP, human nutritional priorities have been neglected and must be considered. This is because diet related health problems continue to escalate, impacting on the security of food systems. We can but speculate on the outcome of the UK break from the EU, nonetheless, it could be argued that it is an opportunity for the UK to deliver an improved agricultural policy package that will consider a nutrition related health agenda.

Agricultural policy in a historical context

In 1957, the European Common Agricultural Policy was created to form a cooperative alliance in order to support farmers and ensure sufficient food supply for health following the food shortages of the war era (Lang *et al.*, 2009). However, the UK chose to opt out of this alliance, continuing commitment to their own post War agricultural policy that focused on increasing production through state subsidies and industrialisation. This regime dominated the world agricultural market in the 1960s, and has been referred to as the productionist paradigm (Lang and Heasman, 2016). In the midst of world food crisis, the UK joined the CAP in 1975 (Lang *et al.*, 2009). The 1970s was a period of neo-liberalisation in the food sector (sometimes referred to as post productivism), which focused on free enterprise while minimizing as much as possible the role of the state (Oosterveer and Sonnenfeld, 2012). Agricultural policy became less about ensuring health and more about increasing the flexibility and diversity of food products available on the market through an increasingly globalized and complex agri-food supply chain (Oosterveer and Sonnenfeld, 2012). This neo-liberalised political agenda continues to dominate global agriculture in the 21st century.

■ CAP Reform 2013: an opportunity to give more priority to nutrition related health?

Since the introduction of EU CAP there has been a number of reforms to improve policy (Lang *et al.*, 2009). The latest reform in 2013 was a new package for the period 2014-2020. This retained the two pillars of support for farmers and aimed to offer a more holistic and integrated approach that can ensure sustainable food security. Pillar 1 covers direct payments to farmers; this includes a basic payment scheme, which replaces the pre-2013 single farm payment. This reform also included the introduction of a greening component, giving additional payments to farms for environmental friendly farming practices. The introduction of greening in Pillar 1 aimed to achieve more connection with Pillar 2, which focuses on rural development including financial payments for agri-environment schemes (European Commission, 2016).