

World Food Day 2019 – Back to the Future?



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The global food system is at a crossroads faced with the challenge of feeding the world's growing population in a more sustainable way. As pressure is mounting from consumers, NGOs and regulators, business is having to change how food is produced, sold and consumed in order to achieve a sustainable future. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's [Special Report on Climate Change and Land](#) and the Committee on Climate Change's [Land Use Report](#) highlight the unsustainable nature of food production and call for a revolution in our food systemsⁱ. Greenpeace is continuing to name and shame retailers failing to demonstrate a clear plastics and packaging strategy, and is championing the growing 'Reuse Revolution' movement that is focused on reusing sustainable materialsⁱⁱ. Across the board, we are witnessing several trends that see businesses introducing new initiatives that draw on past experiences as they seek to restore sustainable diets that are good for health and for the planet. We have taken the opportunity to explore a handful of these trends on World Food Day 2019.

1. How food is produced

There is no doubt that consumers are becoming increasingly aware of food provenance. Restaurants are responding by sourcing more local options for their menus and supermarkets are attempting, with varied success, to make customers more aware of where their food is coming from, encouraging them to have a greater appreciation of seasonal and local foodsⁱⁱⁱ. Shorter and more local supply chains that echo those of a pre-globalised food system may offer an avenue for restoring consumer faith in food and overcoming loss of trust over increasingly prevalent food scandals.

Looking more closely at urban food production, city residents with an appetite to reconnect with their food alongside businesses looking to reduce the carbon footprint of their supply chains are driving the growth of urban farming. The vertical farming market is expected to generate nearly \$13 billion by 2026, driven by urban population growth and the increased popularity of organic food^{iv}. The environmental benefits are also playing a significant role in attracting investors and customers; Clapham's 'Growing Underground' urban farm uses 70% less water than conventional farming^v.

2. How food is sold

Brands have been forced to strip back their packaging in response to the continued war on plastics. Reminiscent of how consumers used to carry out their weekly shops, there has been a re-emergence of reusable and refillable containers. In June, Waitrose began a trial at a branch in Oxford that allows customers to bring their own containers for a variety of produce, including pasta, rice and cereals^{vi}. Earlier in the year, in partnership with

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LOOP, Unilever also announced trials of reusable packaging innovations for nine of its brands, including Hellman's^{vii}. The success of these trials remains to be seen but they rely on the behavioural change of consumers, something famously difficult to achieve.

3. How and what food is consumed

Meal kits have been hailed the new ready meal, the modern twist on the traditional home-cooked meals that have been in decline as a result of the advent of TV dinners. They provide customers with the same convenience but remove the processed element, allowing for fresh and nutritious food to be prepared with ease. The market has grown rapidly, largely dominated by HelloFresh and Gousto in the UK but supermarkets are beginning to move into the space too, with M&S announcing the extension of their six-store trial of their 'In the Bag' meal kit^{viii}. This comes after a study found that the average greenhouse gas emissions of one meal kit was one-third lower than if a meal is cooked from ingredients bought separately at a supermarket^{ix}.

The future success of meal kits is likely to depend on providers making the kits more accessible, attracting thrifty shoppers away from the cheaper in-store ingredient options. Furthermore, meal kit providers have a role to play in rebalancing diets, shifting consumers away from meat being the centre of a meal. 2019 has seen the meat-free agenda continue to grow, as consumers have become increasingly aware of the environmental and health impact of a meat heavy diet. There is an opportunity to tap into demand for higher welfare, sustainably farmed meat by encouraging consumers to pay more for higher quality and ultimately consume less.

The attention on revolutionising the global food system will continue to grow and it is paramount that businesses stay ahead of the curve and understand how they can capitalise on emerging opportunities – perhaps by drawing on experiences of generations past. At Sancroft, we help business to navigate these trends, highlighting where they can play a role in shifting consumers to more sustainable lifestyle choices.

How can Sancroft help your business?

- Help identify your most significant social, economic and environmental challenges and opportunities through materiality assessments, and translate these into a comprehensive strategy with goals, reporting and communication plans.
- Evaluate your business' position following key legislative and policy developments and understand your exposure to challenges and opportunities.
- Review current purchase and use of products and materials to determine actions that future-proof your business.
- Map your supply chain, as well as develop and track policies and goals, to improve transparency and ensure responsible sourcing of goods and services, communicating the impact to key stakeholders.
- Help you plan your response to the rapidly evolving health & wellness agenda – from mapping issues and stakeholder expectations to developing a roadmap for how to capture new opportunities.

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Related upcoming activities

In this time of growing supply chain disruption, we will be hosting an event on the 6 biggest shifts, and the opportunities it creates for businesses in the morning of 6th November.

For more information on what we will cover, see here: <https://sancroft.com/2019/09/26/new-shocks-better-solutions-beating-disruption-with-stronger-more-responsible-supply-chains/> and if you are interested in attending, please contact events@sancroft.com

ⁱ <https://www.carbonbrief.org/ccf-farming-needs-revolution-for-uk-meet-climate-goals>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/story/24844/reuserevolution-vs-plastics-pollution-crisis/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/seasonal-diets-food-sustainability-climate-change-crisis-a9116981.html>

^{iv} <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/vertical-farming-market-to-generate-12-77-billion-globally-by-2026-at-24-6-cagr-allied-market-research-300921706.html>

^v https://www.bbc.co.uk/food/articles/future_of_food

^{vi} <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-48498346>

^{vii} <https://www.unilever.com/news/news-and-features/Feature-article/2019/we-are-introducing-reusable-refillable-packaging-to-help-cut-waste.html>

^{viii} <https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/ranging-and-merchandising/mands-extends-in-the-bag-meal-kit-trial-to-more-stores/594771.article>

^{ix} <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/04/24/meal-kits-better-environment-meals-cooked-supermarket-ingredients/>