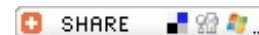




Action urged to combat food price rises

By Laura Sandys MP - 5th July 2011



Laura Sandys MP says its time the government looked at food prices, production, distribution and consumption as being "intrinsic" to our national economic security.

Up and down the country, consumers are finding that the cost of their weekly shop has substantially increased. The price of bread and cereals is up 5.1 per cent, whilst oils and fats have risen by a huge 15.7 per cent this year alone. In British supermarkets, food prices are rising much faster than in other nations - it is time that the government implemented a cross-departmental and coherent strategy to address the UK's food insecurity.

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Action urged to combat food price rises

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Today I will hold an adjournment debate with the minister for food and agriculture, Jim Paice, and will call for the government to implement a clear set of policies to cope with food inflation and food insecurity.

Food has not been seen as central to securing the UK's future prosperity since the second world war. Now that wider food prices have risen by 4.9 per cent, I believe there is a chance that food inflation could seriously undermine our growth targets and hamper consumer spending in the wider economy. With a greater proportion of our constituents' budgets going on the weekly food shop, increasingly families are finding they do not have the disposable income they once did to spend on our high streets. To address these high food prices, government must take action now.

For many years, it was energy security that was perceived to be one of the central threats facing the UK. Today, I believe that food insecurity, having been neglected under previous governments, demands the attention that was previously afforded to securing our constituents' energy supply. Energy security is often focused on four key principles: security of supply; price and affordability; addressing energy demand; and introducing new technologies. This framework provides a useful approach to restoring security to our country's food supply. The government should consider implement policies which include plans to:

- Increase domestic production - to hedge the growing instability in the world markets. The UK imports over 50 per cent of its food; this level of dependency is far too high given the growing international trend of protectionism, population growth and climatic shocks which can cause volatility within the market and limit supply.
- Undertake an assessment of food poverty – this is growing and will have serious health, nutritional and educational impacts.
- A strategy to deal with food waste – this country wastes 30 per cent of the food that it produces. Just as the Green Deal aims to address energy waste, so too we need a joint government initiative to deal with food waste – from the field through to the wheelie bin.
- Increased investment and priority for agronomy, food technologies, food production as part of our growth agenda. Food production is a business of the future and needs to be given greater focus.

It is time the government looked at food prices, production, distribution and consumption as being intrinsic to our national economic security. Food inflation lies at the heart of political and economic instability internationally – we must not let it destabilise our ambition for growth in this country. Implementing reasoned policies now will prevent a food crisis in the future.

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Laura Sandys has been Conservative MP for South Thanet since 2010.

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