

A head for figures

Has Compass really thought through its target on gender equality?



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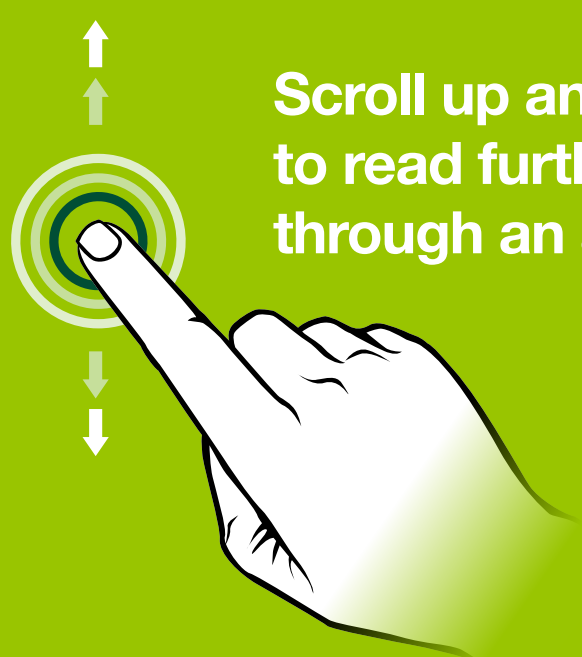
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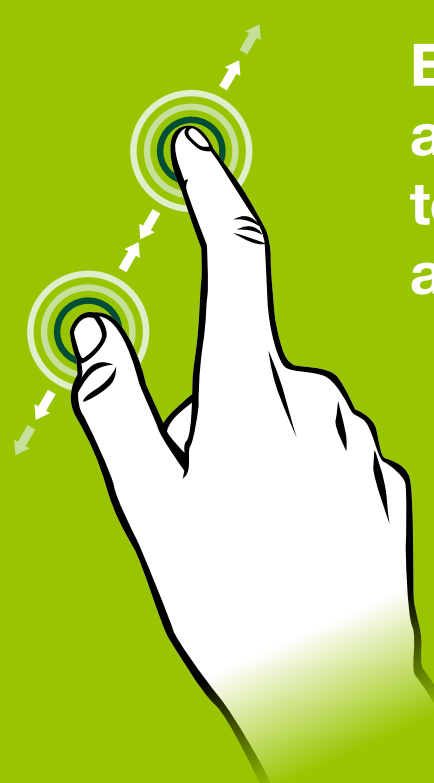
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Gamesmanship at Sports Direct, but will it change the playbook?



So now we know: Mike Ashley is, by his own admission, not Father Christmas and is not “going to make the world wonderful”. He is just a man, trying to make a few billion quid from the toil of the hundreds (and I use the term lightly) by his company Sports Direct.

Docking workers 15 minutes’ pay for being a minute late was “unfair” and “unreasonable” but “I can’t be held responsible for every single thing that goes on in Sports Direct”, he told MPs during a lengthy select committee hearing earlier this week.

The inquiry followed revelations in the *Guardian* that temporary workers at Sports Direct were being paid below the minimum wage (Ashley confirmed that HM Revenue and Customs is investigating this), in part due to lengthy security checks at the end of each shift, for which they are not paid. Perhaps Ashley should have carried out equally rigorous checks on how his staff are, or were (he’s promised to write to MPs within 90 days to say things have changed) being treated.

The employment policies in place at the sites in question were dodgier than the Newcastle United defence. Why? Because (unlike the football club he owns) the retailer had become a “victim of its own success”. The only victims in all this are the workers.

This issue goes to the heart of corporate social responsibility but the big question is whether this parliamentary bear-baiting, as some have put it, makes any difference. In a piece for the *Guardian* Aditya Chakraborty pointed out that MPs only begin to act after the millions have been made (see also Starbucks et al in relation to tax avoidance).

Sports Direct isn’t the first to have its reputation ripped apart by MPs, but is this just an extension of the Punch and Judy theatrics at Westminster or a valuable exercise that will change the way businesses work?

Regulatory change takes time, but the reputational damage can set in much more quickly – especially in a world where social media has given consumers the power to create and kills brands armed only with a smartphone. “Reputation drives business results,” says the Reputation Institute, and “Sports Direct’s overall reputation score is 53.0, placing it firmly in vulnerable territory”.

The spotlight on the company has clearly made investors twitchy. The fact that Ashley has “no oversight or knowledge of large parts of the company’s business ... is extremely concerning for investors”, said Piers Hillier, the chief investment officer of Royal London Asset Management.

Investors are increasingly factoring environmental, social and governance elements into company valuations. Those in the low-wage sectors, such as retail, foodservice and hospitality, should take note. And act. Watching Ashley face the music (a man who’s normally as publicly visible as Santa) is a good place to start if you’re in any doubt.

David Burrows is editor of *Footprint* magazine

The review

Killer allergies, falling waste and the vegetarian boom.

Food allergy fears



In a climate of rising raw material prices, soaring energy costs and a bump in the wage bill there's always a temptation to cut corners, but this should never be at the expense of food safety. News of the death of Paul Wilson, a customer at the Indian Garden restaurant in Easingwold, North Yorkshire, who asked explicitly for a nut-free curry, is both saddening and shocking. The owner, Mohammed Zaman, has been sentenced to six years in prison for manslaughter.

Two million people live with a food allergy and there are regulations in place to ensure they should be able to dine with confidence, according to the Royal Society for Public Health. But two-thirds of fast food takeaways and restaurants are still playing Russian roulette with people's health by routinely breaking the law, the RSPH said.

Accurate labelling and information is only one part of the story here. "Check your ingredients and be mindful of food fraud as substitutions and adulterated products can be dangerous," said Dr Lisa Ackerley, a food safety adviser at the British Hospitality Association. "If it is too good to be true, then there is probably something wrong with it." Fine advice. But it comes from an organisation that has remained reluctant to talk openly about how its members have reacted since the horse-meat scandal or [respond to fresh concerns raised last year](#). Foodservice and hospitality businesses are more vulnerable than ever to food fraud, but the BHA doesn't appear to have woken up to this yet and that leaves the public vulnerable too. Let's hope it won't take another death to set the alarm bells ringing.

Failing on redistribution



There was good news and bad for the grocery supply chain last month. [New figures](#) released by WRAP suggested that food waste levels are 56% lower than previously thought, thanks to efforts to prevent waste as well as more accurate data. However, just 47,000 of the 270,000 tonnes of edible food are being redistributed. "Even after efforts to prevent food waste arising in the supply chain (potentially saving businesses £300m a year), there will still be the opportunity to increase redistribution fourfold, to the equivalent of at least 360m meals," the authors said.

If grocers and manufacturers are struggling to divert good food to worthy causes then what hope is there for foodservice? [New research](#) published by Footprint Intelligence has shown how reluctant university caterers are to look at redistribution options for fear of falling foul of safety regulations. Their concerns are largely unfounded, the report concluded: "You need the right partners involved but you can easily get on with it."

Cauliflower steaks



Meat reduction is a hot topic at the moment. Headlines that sausages can be carcinogenic – however sensationalist – and other health-based messages have arguably helped more than the environmental reasons for cutting back on red meat in particular. We shouldn't forget that a shift in diets could plug a rather sizeable gap in what the Paris agreement hopes to achieve and what's on the table currently, but businesses could be forgiven for focusing on pounds of flesh rather than tonnes of CO2 when they market low- or no-meat products.

Animal welfare is a trend they are tapping into as well, with veganism now an accessible rather than extreme lifestyle: the past decade's 360% rise in vegans (to half a million Brits, according to [research](#) published in May by MORI) is being driven by younger people making "more ethical and compassionate choices". Tesco said recently that sales of chilled vegetarian meals have risen almost 20% (though there are no details of the timescale for this), as it launched cauliflower and mushroom steaks in time for barbecue season. Already popular in the foodservice sector, the former come with drizzle-on sauces to give vegetarian customers more options and inspire meat reducers. This kind of innovation is positive, but pricing them at double that of a whole cauliflower is punchy and defeats the argument that eating less meat is also much cheaper.



How is Compass steering towards gender equality?

The catering firm says half of its chefs will be female by 2020 but if there is a roadmap to that target it is staying firmly under wraps.



Compass Group UK & Ireland has made a pledge to tackle the shortage in female chefs. As part of its “Women in Food” programme, the catering firm has made a commitment to ensure 50% of its chef workforce is female by 2020. It’s a worthy initiative, with figures from the Office for National Statistics showing that female chefs make up just 18.5% of the sector. “We are the first company in the industry looking to tackle the female chef shortage,” says Compass’s resourcing and development director, Melanie Hayes.

But have Hayes and her colleagues been too quick off the mark? Internally set targets are always aspirational but our analysis suggests this one is more pie in the sky than Panglossian. And here’s why.

Compass Group UK & Ireland currently employs 4,393 chefs. Of those, 2,856 are male and 1,537 are female – a 65%-35% split. Not too bad, given the ONS statistics above. But how can they get to 50%-50%?

As we see it there are three possible scenarios. In the first, the total number of chefs remains the same. In this instance Compass would need 659 roles to swing from men to women, which equates to about 15 roles a month every month until 2020. This also assumes that no women leave the business at any point and no men are recruited for any of the roles that the 659 men are leaving.

“We hope to see an incremental increase in the number of female chefs,” says Hayes, but “we will not be putting a freeze on employing male chefs”. Indeed, that would be considered positive discrimination and therefore illegal. According to the government’s [briefing on the Equality Act 2010](#), “the new positive action provisions make it clear that employers must not adopt policies or practices designed to routinely favour candidates with a certain protected characteristic, even when there is evidence of under-representation or disadvantage”.

Internally set targets are always aspirational but our analysis suggests this one is more pie in the sky than Panglossian

A second scenario, therefore, could involve the total number of chefs increasing. In this case 1,319 new roles are created by 2020 and only women are recruited for the roles. No women leave the business at any time and no men are recruited to any of the new roles. This amounts to about 30 female recruits a month every month.

In the final scenario, the total number of chefs decreases. This means 1,319 male chefs leaving the business with no new male or female recruits. This equates to about 30 male departures per month every month until 2020.

Compass maintains that its 50% female by 2020 target is achievable, but after a number of emails Hayes is reluctant to say how. “Our aspirational goal is to achieve a 50% female chef workforce by 2020 and we are putting measures in place to achieve this. We will be reporting on a regular basis on how we are performing,” she explains.

Kirsty Rogers, a partner at law firm DWF and an expert in employment law, suggests that the client agenda could have something to do with the company’s reluctance to divulge its plans. “I suspect one possibility in terms of the ability to achieve the target may be the likelihood of a new client – or clients – landing but this may be something that the company are not authorised to talk about yet and consequently they aren’t prepared to speak about the ‘strategy to achieve the target’,” she explains.

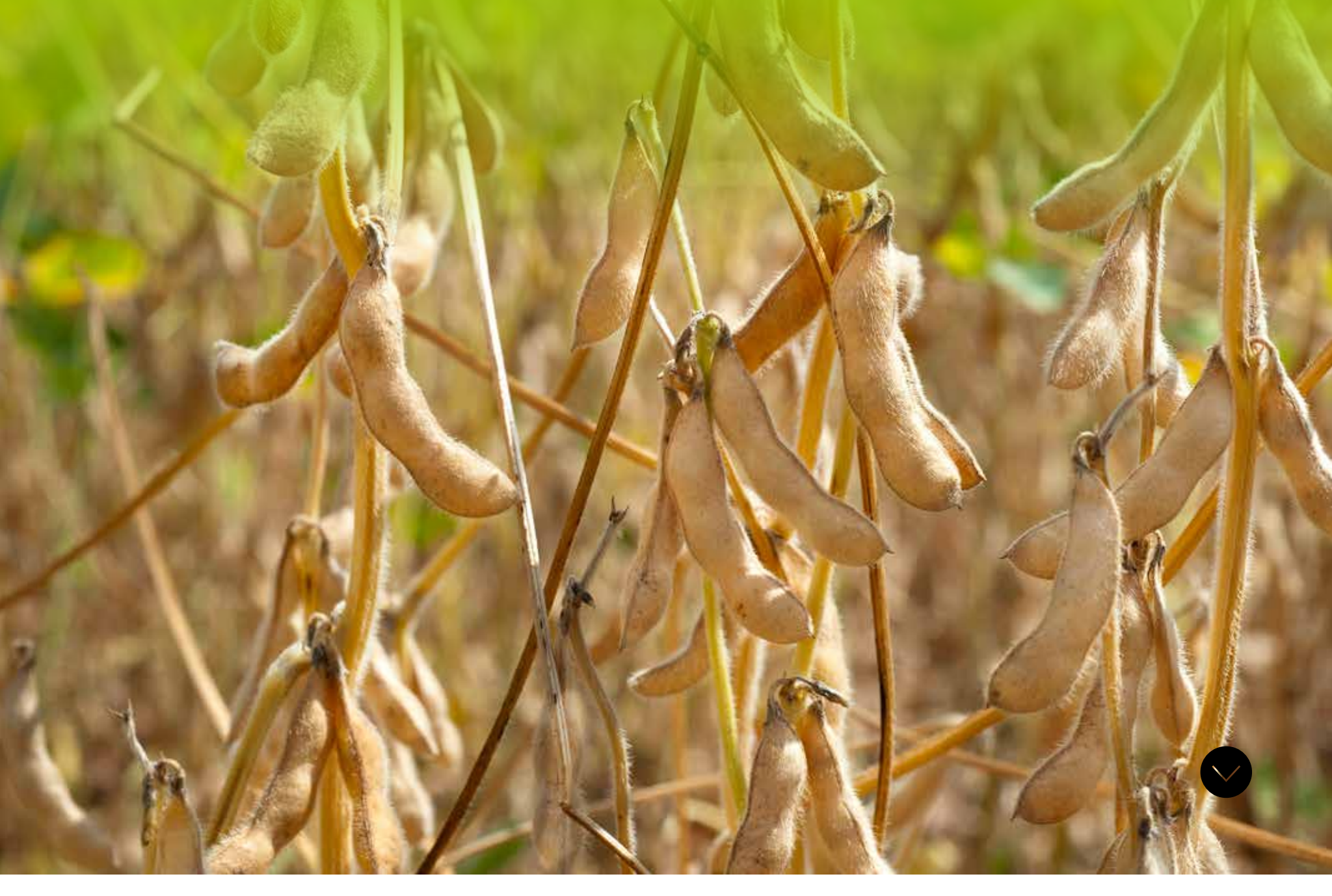
Rogers sees the only way to achieve the new targets as an aggressive growth agenda with a few new contracts that are already promised but perhaps embargoed. Nonetheless, it is still going to be “very difficult” to achieve 50% within the timeframes without coming close to, if not actually breaking the law, she says.

Another problem will be that, in publicising strategies around this agenda, Compass may be inadvertently putting off potentially brilliant candidates who happen to be male from applying. “That will be a loss not just to them but also their clients,” says Rogers, and “is something that as a service provider they will be keen not to do”.

Disclosures on corporate diversity followed by commitments to address under-representation are to be applauded. But to then meet the targets there needs to be a strategy (agreed at board level) in place. Compass may well have such a strategy but is clearly not keen to publicise it for the reasons discussed. The other possibility is that there is no plan – and in that case the commitment is not just pie in the sky, but (potentially) pie in the face.

Slow progress on soy

Foodservice firms are lagging way behind when it comes to responsible sourcing, according to WWF. By David Burrows.



What very little difference two years make. WWF has just published its second scorecard assessing the performance of Europe’s biggest retail, foodservice, processing and feed companies in relation to soy. “Foodservice companies are lagging behind,” the authors noted, with only one – Sweden’s Martin & Servera scored 22 out of 24 points – classed as “leading the way”. The rest are either just “starting the journey” towards responsible procurement of soy, or they are not yet in the starting blocks.

If you think this sounds familiar, then you’d be right. In 2014, when the first scorecard was published, *Footprint* highlighted the “[lazy buying practices](#)” of foodservice companies when it comes to soy. They hadn’t been challenged on the issue, said WWF, which gave them an excuse to brush things under the carpet. That laissez faire attitude by-and-large persists, it seems.

Sandra Mulder, WWF’s senior adviser on market change, feels that “many companies take advantage of the lack of consumer awareness about soy in order to do nothing on this issue”. Indeed, does Joe Bloggs in the street know that he chomps through 61 kilos of soy a year? Probably not, given that most of it is embedded in his meat and dairy intake. And that is part of the problem.

Excuses, excuses

Think soy and people think dairy-free, not dairy, beef, chicken or pork. The foodservice sector is doing the same. “I frequently hear excuses from these companies,” explained WWF’s agricultural commodities manager, Emma Keller, in a [recent piece](#) for *Footprint*. “We don’t have any power in the supply chain” and “There is not enough Roundtable on Responsible Soy (RTRS) certified soy available” are two of the most common, she said. But just half of the RTRS soy grown is currently being sold, which leaves plenty of room for companies to request only responsibly sourced soy from their supply chains.

“It will cost more” is the next excuse, but the difference in price is negligible, according to Keller. The cost to the environment is anything but: in recent years this “wonder crop” has undergone the greatest expansion of any global crop and its popularity threatens tropical forests and other important ecosystems such as savannahs and grasslands.

Foodservice companies don’t generally seem to care, however. The likes of Brakes, Whitbread and Ikea didn’t even respond to WWF’s questionnaire (only half the 133 companies contacted responded). *Footprint* approached them for a reaction to the findings and each claimed it was looking at the issue (see “Hiding from the hidden ingredient”).

Elior responded but scored a zero, leaving it in the same position it was in 2014. Pret A Manger, which wasn’t in the first assessment, also failed to score a single point. Neither company is part of the RTRS and neither has a responsible soy or “no deforestation” commitment. Elior did not respond to emailed requests from *Footprint*, but a spokesperson from Pret A Manager said the company has now engaged with WWF on this issue and is “confident we will make significant progress this year”.

Sodexo, Compass and Nando’s have all made baby steps on their journeys towards responsible soy, although none of them scored more than four out of 24. Sodexo admitted that it has more work to do, though it has carried out an extensive inventory of current soy volumes. “Armed with those figures, we are now working on a strategy to increase our use of sustainable soy,” said a company spokesperson.

Meanwhile, Nando’s, despite its poor score, appears to be trying to make good on its commitment of two years ago to take this issue seriously. “The soy used in our products is now all responsibly sourced and certified by either ProTerra or RTRS,” a spokesperson confirmed.

Mind the gap

These examples mark a start, but progress has been sluggish. Placing foodservice companies in the same table as retailers only serves to highlight the gap in performance between the two sectors. Marks & Spencer and Waitrose each scored 18.5, using 52% (25,156 tonnes) and 65% (33,574 tonnes) of responsible soy respectively. Tesco managed only 3% (7,289 tonnes) but still outscored the foodservice companies with a 9.5 out of 24.

Still, there is work to be done. More retailers “should push their suppliers to source responsible soy, and if this fails, at least in the short term, they should cover their use of soy with RTRS certificates”, WWF suggested. The information should be published, too, the NGO urged, to highlight the volumes of soy used both directly and embedded in animal products.

However, WWF is beginning to doubt whether the food industry can be trusted to take action without a nudge. Having assessed 133 companies in its [2016 scorecard](#), it is calling on the European Commission to step in. “We urgently need clear rules, both to support progressive companies and to push the laggards to improve their performance,” said its senior forest policy officer, Anke Schulmeister. The commission should “develop an EU action plan on deforestation and forest degradation to reduce the EU’s disastrous footprint on unique forests like the Cerrado or the Amazon”, she added.

Hiding from the hidden ingredient

Company	2014 scorecard	2016 scorecard (score out of 24)	Reaction to scorecard
Compass	Did not respond	On the journey (4)	‘We will continue to engage with the WWF and our suppliers in order to fully map and responsibly manage our soy footprint’
Sodexo	Not yet on the starting blocks	On the journey (3)	‘We have made a start, carrying out an extensive inventory of current soy volumes. Armed with those figures, we are now working on a strategy to increase our use of sustainable soy’
Nando’s	Did not respond	On the journey (2)	‘The soy used in our products is now all responsibly sourced and certified by either ProTerra or RTRS’
Elior	Not yet on the starting blocks	Not yet on the starting blocks (0)	Did not respond to emailed requests
Pret A Manger	N/A	Not yet on the starting blocks (0)	‘We have engaged with WWF on this issue and are confident we will make significant progress this year’
Brakes	N/A	Did not respond	‘Brakes continues to review the opportunities for the responsible sourcing of soya within its supply chain, as well as evaluating the relevant developments taking place among groups such as the RTRS’
Ikea	N/A	Did not respond	‘100% of sourced salmon and around 50% of chicken are fed RTRS or ProTerra certified soy. We are developing strategies for the more complex supply chains of cattle and pigs’
Whitbread	N/A	Did not respond	‘The soy we use as a business is largely embedded within our meat and dairy supply chains so we are working with our meat and dairy suppliers to ensure that the standards set in our soy responsible sourcing policy are being met’

Behind the headlines

Trump's energy policy



The Republican candidate has threatened to scrap the Paris deal and offered support for coal, but is he serious, asks George Robinson.



Now that Donald Trump has the required number of delegates to be the Republican candidate for the US presidency, analysts are scrambling to identify just what this might mean for the country and the world.

There have already been some initial attempts. In May, Laurent Fabius, who was French foreign minister during the Paris climate talks, described Trump as a climate change denier and said his election as president could see the climate agreement derailed.

Trump confirmed this sentiment on May 26th in a speech in North Dakota. While not directly addressing climate change, he pledged to “cancel” the Paris agreement and to only work with environmentalists whose “agenda is protecting nature”.

Whether he can cancel the Paris agreement is highly debatable. If it is ratified before he can assume the presidency, then the US will be locked into it for four years. He can, however, just order his future government not to follow any of its stipulations. The international opprobrium that will follow probably won't trouble his conscience too much.

The rest of Trump's speech fell along similar lines: “A Trump administration will focus on real environmental challenges, not phoney ones.” He also called for a rolling back of bureaucracy and barriers – without much elucidation of what exactly these were – blaming them for holding back the coal industry (the darling of the North Dakotan economy) and stifling competition.

Trump has pledged to ‘cancel’ the Paris agreement on climate change

What he skipped around was the fact that the biggest threat to coal comes from shale gas and renewable sources of energy, providing the much-needed competition he had earlier lauded in the very same speech. And with his ambition to kickstart the controversial Keystone XL pipeline, coal prices would only be squeezed further.

Another focus was on energy security, with Trump pledging to make the US completely energy independent. Again, Keystone XL would not exactly help in this regard. A direct flow of cheap tar sands into the US would probably be more cost-effective than many home-grown alternatives.

Whether this speech represents Trump's real thoughts is dubious. Pinning him down on any policy position is no easy task, and the Guardian reported that much of his speech was based on advice from Kevin Cramer, a US representative from the state. It is more likely that he simply wanted to say something that would get him cheers and applause, and not alienate his right-wing base.

Trump is first and foremost a populist – somebody who likes telling people what they want to hear. This is why he promises an awkward combination of deregulation and protectionism for the energy industry, something that it is hard to imagine working in practice.

Perhaps we need to wait until he is being effectively challenged by Hillary Clinton before we see a serious policy programme. Clinton's hands have so far been full fighting off the challenge from Bernie Sanders in the Democratic primary.



Once Trump is being properly scrutinised, however, he won't be able to get away with delegating policy to Republican congressmen. He will need policies that will convince moderate swing voters that he is serious about putting in place a framework to tackle the serious energy problems – both national and global – that will present themselves over the coming years.

George Robinson is a consultant at Westbourne Communications.

Political Print

A vote to leave the EU would have an enormous impact on the foodservice sector – but businesses have so far been reluctant to wade into the referendum debate.



In less than a fortnight we will know whether the UK public has voted to leave the EU. It barely needs repeating that the political ramifications of a vote to leave would be monumental.

- Would the prime minister be forced to step down triggering a leadership election?
- Would the overwhelmingly pro-EU Scotland force another referendum on the country's membership of the UK?
- Could the pro-remain environment secretary, Liz Truss, possibly remain in post having consistently refused to entertain the prospect of a plan B for UK agriculture in the event of Brexit?

The government and others in the remain camp will hope such questions need never be answered after the vote on June 23rd, and that the pattern of recent national votes holds true with the public choosing the status quo over a leap into the unknown.

But one can't help but feel that, in having gone all-in in its campaign for continued EU membership (and necessarily so, since setting out a series of plan Bs is simply doing the leave camp's job for them), the government has multiplied the chaos that would be engendered by Brexit.

And what of the voice of business? In February, *Footprint* noted that food businesses had been non-committal in their attitudes towards the referendum. Four months later and several industry groups have finally climbed off of the fence.

Hospitality relies heavily on migrant labour and imports a large proportion of its food from the EU so the BHA's uncertainty on the matter is surprising

The National Farmers Union has declared that the interests of farmers are best served by staying in the EU; however, it will not be actively campaigning in the referendum nor advising members on how to vote.

The Food and Drink Federation, meanwhile, published a poll in April that revealed 71% of its members believed their interests would be best served by remaining in the EU, leading the FDF itself to state: "Our view is clear – the UK should remain a member!"

Conversely, the hospitality industry has been more equivocal – a surprising state of affairs, perhaps, given what is at stake for a sector that relies heavily on migrant labour and imports a large proportion of its food from the EU. True, the Institute of Hospitality recently published a survey that showed 52.4% of UK hospitality managers want Britain to stay in the EU, against 36.3% who back a vote to leave, but neither the IoH nor the British Hospitality Association have come out decisively for or against Brexit.

Perhaps these industry bodies feel it is their role to inform rather than persuade members? Or maybe they feel the pros and cons of the UK's membership of the EU balance each other out? Either way, time is running out for any representative body that wants the voice of the foodservice industry to be heard in the final days of the campaign.

The contribution of individual companies in our sector has been muted at best – presumably since businesses are reluctant to potentially alienate a portion of their customer base by positioning themselves on the opposite side of a passionate debate. Tim Martin, the chairman of the JD Wetherspoon pub chain, is a notable exception as an industry leader who has publicly supported the leave campaign, while the Compass CEO, Paul Walsh, signed a letter to the *Times* backing a remain vote in a personal capacity.

Whether such diplomacy will remain intact should the polls tighten in the days leading up to the vote remains to be seen. At the very least, big businesses can expect to come under pressure from campaigners to declare their allegiance in the hope of swaying the last few undecided voters.

Political events don't come much bigger for the food industry than the vote on June 23rd. Whether you favour business as usual or believe it's time to change our relationship with Europe, the day of reckoning is nigh.

My viewpoint

It's time for a serious rethink of sustainability standards to tackle the urgent climate challenges the world is facing, says Mark Driscoll.

“For many years I have worked with some of the world's largest conservation bodies, businesses and other civil society organisations to develop sustainability standards for a wide range of globally traded commodities.

Many of these focus on specific sustainability challenges, such as animal welfare, global trade or organic standards. These schemes have done a fantastic job in raising consumer awareness of a whole host of sustainability issues, and in some cases have made an impact – like the highly recognisable Fairtrade mark from Fairtrade International which has improved the lives of millions of smallholder farmers.

At the same time, not all of these have brought the success they have strived for: many of these schemes provide a poor return on their millions of dollars of investment, and are increasingly regarded as a “silver bullet” for some of the urgent challenges we face today. Instead of being viewed as one instrument in a toolbox of solutions, they have been viewed – mistakenly, in my view – as the toolbox itself.

More than 20 years ago, amid growing concern over the impact of overfishing on the marine environment and on seafood supplies, Unilever and WWF came together to form what we now know as the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC). Businesses have used this market-driven model as a way of tackling a whole host of sustainability challenges. Today, there are hundreds of schemes, each with their own set of criteria and verification standards, which are starting to confuse both consumers and producers.

The impact of many schemes is also increasingly dubious: on the one hand we can monitor the number of farmers involved, but on the other the results are less clear – percentage of rainforest preserved, species saved from extinction, livelihoods improved or significant improvements in water quality and quantity. In fact, the evidence increasingly points the opposite way, towards continued environmental degradation and social injustice.

So we need to look at the bigger picture and move beyond the farm-by-farm approach to sustainability. That way we can ensure that we achieve the ultimate goal of making all products sustainable and fair. In other words, to ensure that there are only sustainable choices on shop shelves so that consumers don't have to choose between different products with varying degrees of sustainability.

How do we get to that point? I don't have all the answers – no one does. But now is the time to review the impact of certification and explore a more holistic approach that goes beyond individual certification marks and logos so we can get to every consumer and every farmer, no matter how small or large.

What I would love to see is more of these certification schemes collaborating more to consolidate their criteria in order to create a comprehensive standard that all retail products should measure up to. Working together will allow these separate schemes to address a wider spectrum of sustainable development needs, as well as maximise their collective impact. Such collaboration won't be easy – many certification schemes have become multimillion-pound brands in themselves – but it is necessary and timely.

We also need to move beyond a solely market-based certification and standards approach. For example, we need to create tailored landscape-based solutions in specific geographies, work with or lobby policymakers in producer countries, and look at alternative business models or products. Taking a system approach to transforming our products will not only make the products we buy more “fair”, they will also help to improve resilience and empower communities, and reconnect consumers with the people who produce their food, and how it is produced.



As we celebrate 20 years of the Marine Stewardship Council, grapple with the question of how to limit global warming to 1.5°C and explore how we deliver the ambitions of the new Sustainable Development Goals, now is the time to reflect on how we can move beyond a certification-based approach, and step up the action.”

Mark Driscoll is head of food at Forum for the Future

Footprint insight: misguided approach to diets

The public are the losers in the foolhardy fat fight among public health experts and campaigners, says Nick Hughes.



Making healthy food choices is hard enough at the best of times, such as the onslaught of messaging imploring us to choose one product over another. But when even public health professionals can't agree on the most basic of nutritional guidance you can forgive the public for giving up and going home to phone their local takeaway.

Make no mistake: the big losers from the unseemly row between the newly established Public Health Collaboration and Public Health England over the role of fat in the diet are members of the public who have to navigate their way through another bombardment of sensationalist (and in some cases deliberately disingenuous) headlines.

"Get fat to get fit", declared the *Sun*; "Eat more fat to stay healthy", screamed the *Daily Express*. Even the *Telegraph* couldn't resist wading in with an overblown "Eat fat to get thin" headline of its own.

The result of this controversial report has simply been to add a further barrier to the effective communication of dietary information to the public

Whatever the validity of the argument that current national dietary guidelines, in their demonisation of fat and promotion of low-fat alternatives, have been fuelling the obesity epidemic for years, the result of the Public Health Collaboration's controversial report has simply been to add a further barrier to the effective communication of dietary information to the public.

The tabloid press in particular has form for reporting the latest piece of dietary research as fact without putting it in the context of the whole weight of evidence. Bacon, red wine and chocolate are just a handful of products that are regularly subjected to hysterical and contradictory headlines. But public health professionals who choose to fight their battles through the medium of national newspapers must take their fair share of the blame for the confusion and apathy that such headlines engender among the population at large.

While it's legitimate for doctors and academics to disagree, it serves nobody's interests for their disagreements to be played out in the full media glare, particularly when the research conflicts with dietary advice that has only just been updated and disseminated. To be genuinely acting in the interests of the public, health professionals should do their utmost to publicly present a united front and do their squabbling and horse-trading behind closed doors.

One of the saddest facets of the whole episode is that the row over fat has obscured areas where both the Public Health Collaboration and Public Health England agree – for example, that fruit and vegetables should account for the bulk of the diet. In a country that gets nowhere close to hitting its five-a-day fruit and veg target, we should be shouting such advice from the rooftops. As it is, the public are left scratching their heads wondering whether they can have that second slice of cheese on their burger after all.

A postscript to the row is that elsewhere in the world, countries such as Sweden, Germany and Brazil are looking ahead to future food system challenges by incorporating sustainability into their dietary guidelines (see "Flying the flag for sustainability"). In the context of such progressive thinking, the UK's obsessive wrangling over individual nutrients seems even more foolhardy and backward.

Flying the flag for sustainability

Just four countries – Sweden, Germany, Qatar and Brazil – out of 215 include sustainability criteria in their dietary guidelines, according to new research published in May by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the University of Oxford's Food Climate Research Network (FCRN).

This is a "missed opportunity", noted the authors of "Plates, Pyramids, Planet", given "ample evidence" showing that a healthy diet tends to be a green one too. The UK is amongst those struggling to put the two together.

Indeed, the latest iteration of dietary guidelines, the Eatwell Guide (see main story) has a lower environmental impact than its predecessor, the Eatwell Plate, and a far lower one than current consumption patterns. But analysis by the Carbon Trust shows it won't take us anywhere near the kinds of greenhouse gas cuts required to meet the commitments within the Climate Change Act.

"Progress on healthy sustainable diets "has been intermittent and there has been a lack of continuity related to changes in government", the authors noted in a section focused on the UK, as they highlighted how specialists groups have been formed and dissolved at an alarming rate.

The Sustainable Development Commission and the Council of Food Policy Advisors were both dissolved in 2010, while the Green Food Project initiated by the coalition government has disappeared without trace.

The GFP offered a glimmer of hope (as reported by *Footprint*). A lot of the focus during the working groups was on meat consumption – whether we should be looking at all meats and how to phrase the change needed, "moderation" or "reduction". Perhaps the whole thing is too controversial? From the outset, DEFRA pitched its role firmly as "enabler" rather than "owner" of the principles that emerged (one of which was to moderate meat intake).

FCRN's experts picked up similar ambiguity even in the four pioneers of food-based dietary guidelines. The advice given on meat often lacks specificity," they noted.

Sweden is one country that has taken things to another level, however. Its April 2015 update embraces environmental considerations from the outset, said FCRN, highlighting this statement: "What you eat isn't just important to your own personal wellbeing; it's important to the environment as well."

And then there's the detail. The Swedish National Food Agency (NFA) sets out nine themes and for each there are recommended actions, ways to achieve them, and then the health and environmental implications.

The advice ends with a "one minute advice" section, but there's plenty of detail too, with the NFA even tackling some of the more nuanced advice, including the "positive environmental impacts of free range beef and lamb" and the lower environmental impact of high fibre vegetables compared to salad greens.

The intention is to track any changes in consumption that come from the guidelines, but this will be far from easy or conclusive. Indeed, food-based dietary guidelines are just a first baby step – an official perspective of what "good diets look like", said FCRN's Tara Garnett.

"No one in their right mind would say that once you have the guidelines in place, problem solved. But they have a role to play in providing a statement of intent – a vision of what 'good' looks like – which should then inform subsequent policies and actions," she explained.

Indeed, to have a real impact on food consumption patterns the guidelines must have clear links to food policies that are actually implemented, such as school and hospital meals, public procurement, advertising regulations and industry standards.

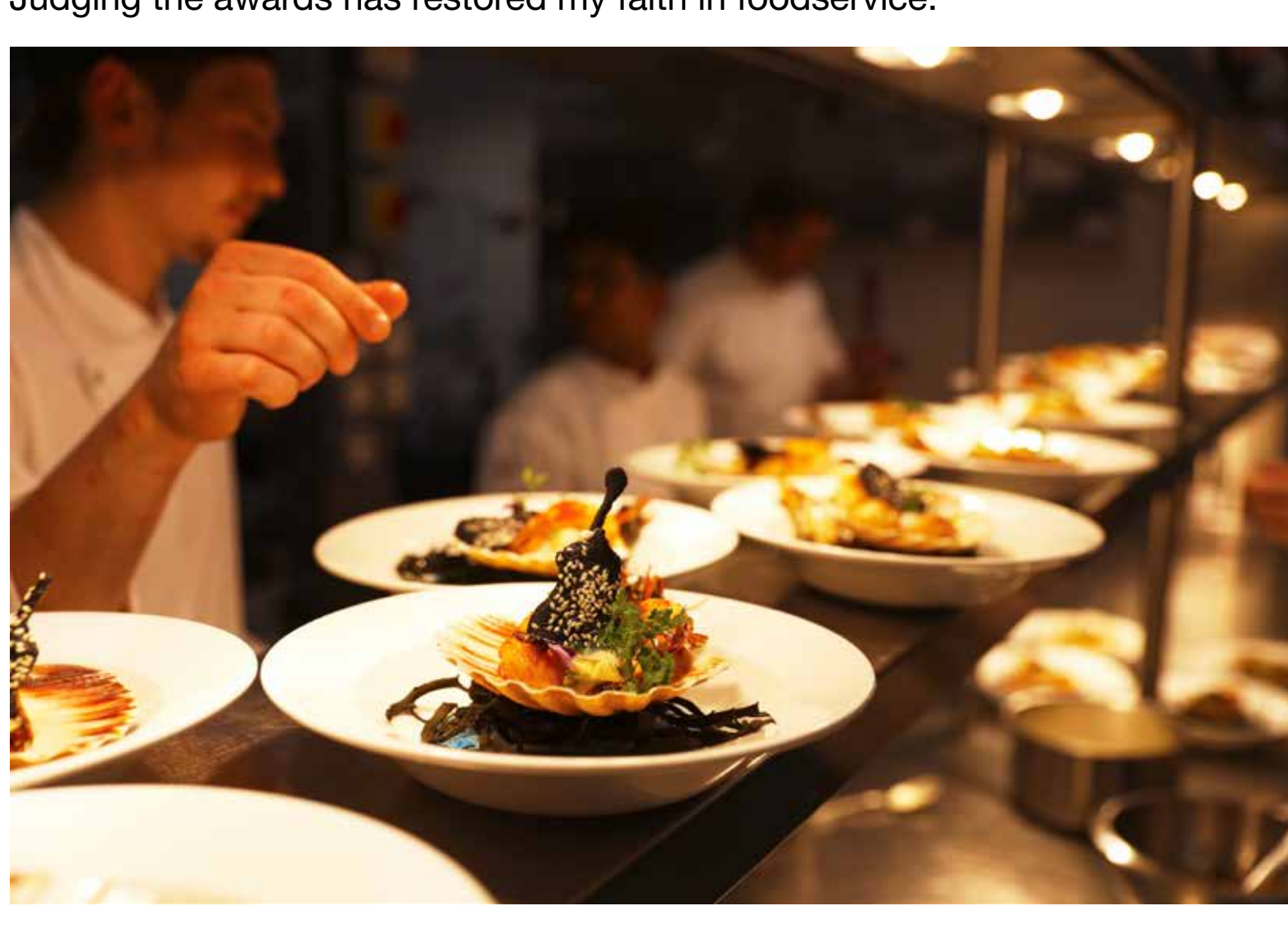
Nick Hughes is associate editor at **Footprint** magazine.

Footprint Awards restore faith in foodservice

From helping vulnerable children get fed in the school holidays to projects which dramatically cut waste and water, the 2016 Footprint Awards served up a refreshing slice of inspiration, says Amy Fetzner.



If you are feeling cynical about foodservice's commitment to sustainability, the 2016 Footprint Awards was the perfect tonic to reinvigorate and inspire. This year's winners included a "humbling entry that changes children's lives" from Food Cardiff, which ensures vulnerable school children get fed and have fun during the holidays. Another winner, the London Linen Group, promises to bring "positive disruption to the sector to force others to follow", according to the judges, with the introduction of a closed-loop textile recycling process; an industry first. One judge even revealed that, "I've been massively inspired. Judging the awards has restored my faith in foodservice."



Festival fun

The awards celebrate the individuals and businesses that are leading the way in sustainability in foodservice from employee engagement to tackling food waste. This year's winners were celebrated with a festival-themed dinner which brought a festival vibe to Hyatt Regency London – The Churchill. Instead of the tractors or live farm animals which graced previous events, there was real grass, fruit and vegetable baskets and tree branches decorating the tables, along with garden lights, fairy wings and glow sticks for guests to get into the Glastonbury vibe.

Awards improve outcomes

Awards schemes are known for driving leadership and promoting best practice, but while the publicity of bagging an honour spreads ideas and drives new norms, behind the scenes the awards also drive improvements in the organisations that enter them. Just the process of entering a competition can help organisations assess and benchmark initiatives, re-evaluate targets and research best practice to shape and drive internal efforts.

Research has shown that symbolic awards can increase employee performance, and that award-winning companies outperform the market. This is in part because they are examples of best practice and in part because of the halo effect of the award in driving sales, efficiencies and innovation.

This has been the experience of those entering, and winning, the Footprint Awards with entrants remarking on the multiple benefits. "For an estate like ours, winning is a great motivator, and it spurs us on to do more," said Lord Newborough, owner of the Rhug Estate. The organic estate's "fantastic circular approach to farming methods", which includes significant investment in renewable energy creation, bagged the sustainable use of natural resources award.



Driving the agenda

"Awards like this are fabulous," enthused Gelf Alderson, the head chef of River Cottage HQ, this year's special achievement award winner. "They drive sustainability and ethics to the forefront of big business. This puts it on their agenda and that can make a massive difference. These are the guys that feed millions of people on a daily basis, so every small change they make is fantastic. It gives them the pat on the back that recognises that they're doing the right thing."

"We need an organisation like Footprint," commented Nick James, European marketing, Tate and Lyle Sugars, "to shine a spotlight on the enormous contribution that so many individuals and organisations have made in making a sustained impact to the way we live our lives. Our supply chains are improving, and ultimately this means that consumers can shop and eat products that they know are more ethical, more sustainable and ultimately better for them, for their family and for the planet."

Keeping ahead of the market

Reflecting the findings of the Footprint "Sustainability Index Trends Report", the buzzwords on the (festival-themed) street were provenance, collaboration and supply chain. "These days consumers just expect more," noted Paul Lumley, the brand and communications lead for Nestlé Professional. "And not just about what they see in the food that they buy and consume, but also where it's come from and the processes involved."



Collaboration in action

Many of the award entries showcased the power of collaboration in action and how much more natural this is becoming in foodservice. "Winning is really exciting," explained Lucy Frankel, the communications director of Vegware, which won the Waste Reduction and Management award for its work with BNY Mellon and Aramark to ensure disposables end up in the correct waste stream and are recycled. "It's recognition that collaboration across the supply chain in waste really can make a genuine difference."

The impossible is now possible

The awards repeatedly demonstrated the rising importance of tackling supply chain impacts. Sodexo proved that size and scale are no barrier to success by winning the environmentally friendly logistics award. The company successfully removed 100,000 deliveries from more than 1,000 operational sites in its network by consolidating deliveries, saving 86 tonnes of CO₂ and an estimated £900k per year.

Edward Salter, the logistics manager of Sodexo UK and Ireland, explained:

"Winning this award is an example that when things don't appear possible, there's still opportunity. It's important for everybody to understand that things that weren't possible five-six years ago are achievable now."



A sustainability barometer

After the Paris agreement to keep the increase in global temperatures to below 2°C, and the launch of the sustainable development goals, 2016 is the year that many businesses are finally making sustainability mainstream.

"It's clear from the passion in this room," noted James. "It's packed with multinational companies and brands as well as small independents, ranging from operators through to distributors and their own supply chain. The fact that everyone is here recognises that sustainability is a vital issue for industry. It's being taken seriously and there are people within every organisation working and striving to make their businesses more sustainable."

"The awards are a barometer of how the industry is evolving," added Charlie Miers, the co-founder and CEO of Footprint. "This year the entries have been superb. I'm really excited what we might see next year."

More details on the Footprint Awards past, current and future, are available [here](#).

Will this be the breakthrough year for equal pay?

Gender equality makes good business sense – and new regulations mean 2016 could bring a big leap forward for women, writes Nick Hughes.



Appointing more women to senior roles has long been a priority for companies seeking to present themselves as inclusive places to work. Yet while the journey towards gender diversity in the corporate world has been steady – if a little plodding – progress towards pay equality has been far slower.

For those pushing the equal pay agenda, hopes are high that 2016 could prove a breakthrough year. Last summer, the government announced that companies with more than 250 employees will have to publish their gender pay gap. The regulations are expected to come into effect on October 1st, with employers having to publish the required information on a date of their choosing by April 2018.

So should businesses have anything to fear from the new reporting requirements and why do gender diversity and equality make good business sense?

Evidence suggests that far from being a box-ticking exercise, gender diversity is good for the bottom line. Research from McKinsey shows that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity are 15% more likely to have financial returns above their respective national industry medians.

Sodexo is one foodservice company that says it has reaped the benefits of gender balance in its organisation. The company has a target for 50% of management positions to be occupied by women by 2020, which has almost been achieved five years ahead of schedule with the figure standing at 49.4% in 2015.

In 2014, Sodexo published the results of its internal gender balance research, which gathered data from 52,000 managers working in 90 entities and compared the performance of those that were gender-balanced – classed as 40-60% women in management – versus those that weren't.

"The results were compelling," says Meg Horsburgh, the head of diversity and inclusion at Sodexo UK & Ireland. "Over the past three consecutive years, the gender-balanced entities were 13% more likely to record consistent organic growth and 23% more likely to show an increase in gross profit. They also performed better for employee engagement, brand image, consumer satisfaction and client retention."

The high proportion of women in management roles at Sodexo hasn't been achieved by chance

Horsburgh says the high proportion of women in management roles at Sodexo hasn't been achieved by chance. The promotion of gender balance at all levels of its business has been a strategic objective since 2009 and Sodexo's efforts have been validated by the *Sunday Times* naming it among its top 50 employers for women for the third consecutive year in 2016.

Sodexo is now turning its attention to the issue of pay where, although performing above the national average, the company still has work to do to achieve gender parity. In 2014, Sodexo conducted its first sample equal pay audit of about a third of its staff, using a number of generic jobs within a cross-section of its employee base. It revealed that the overall gender pay gap across this sample population of approximately 10,600 employees was 10.5% compared with the national average of 19.1%.

The company has since committed to publishing an overall gender pay figure this 2016, before the government requirement to do so. "We think that gender pay equality is a vital step towards a gender-balanced business and that improving transparency on this issue is crucial if businesses are collectively going to address the pay gap," says Horsburgh.

Sodexo's pre-emptive move will put pressure on foodservice competitors to follow suit. And although there are likely to be nervous employers fretting about what their pay data will reveal, Jenny Lincoln, a gender research and policy officer at Business in the Community, says businesses should welcome the move towards transparency.

"Transparency will encourage employers to take action to close their gap, tackling the root causes of inequality in their organisation. It will enhance corporate reputation, increase staff's engagement and attract new talent," she says.

For businesses that identify disparities between pay for men and women, Lincoln says understanding what is causing the gap is crucial to tackling it. Unequal pay for doing the same job, which is unlawful, could be one reason for a disparity; another could be a higher number of female workers in part-time roles (since the hourly rate for part-time work tends to be lower than the full-time equivalent).

"A lack of women in senior roles will also be driving the gender pay gap, so employers must ensure both women and men have equal opportunities," adds Lincoln. "This involves bias-proofing recruitment, performance and promotion processes and encouraging take up of shared parental leave."

With data showing that girls are outperforming boys in GCSEs and more women are graduating from universities than men, the pool of female talent is becoming deeper and stronger by the year. So companies that foster a male-dominated working environment are not just doing a disservice to women, they are also actively damaging their own long-term prospects.

Chitchat

Can less meat mean more profits?



Have you heard of World Meat Free Day?

Nope.

Neither had I. But it's on July 13th.

Oh. Cue a flurry of polls showing that people want to eat less meat and demanding more vegetarian options from us then?

You've got it. Younger people are particularly keen flexitarians apparently.

They would be.

Nearly half (48%) of 16 to 19-year-olds and 40% of 16 to 24s agree that a meat-free diet, or one where we eat less meat, and better meat when we do eat it, is better for the environment as it lowers carbon emissions.

Says who?

The Plate for the Planet campaign. Me neither. [WWF-UK](#) and [Sodexo](#) discovered a similar trend, though. One in five millennials in their poll said they intend to eat less meat this year. Of those, 68% want to be able to choose plant-based options from the menu.

Let them go to Pret, then. It's barbecue season.

Pret's "healthy" vegetarian options have actually [boosted sales](#) and they're turning one store into a "pop-up" vegetarian Pret this summer.

Bit niche though, isn't it?

Not really, given the polling they've done. Half of their customers want a vegetarian fridge in every outlet.

It won't last. What people say and what they actually do are very different.

True. But Pret isn't going it alone. Sodexo is also designing menus with less meat. It says they're healthier and greener and the board is backing the initiative with cash.

Sounds expensive.

Not necessarily. They're actually finding most of the dishes cost the same, and some are cheaper.

Sounds like a marketing gimmick to me.

Actually, they are arguably playing the long game. Investors are pretty interested in the environmental performance of businesses these days. The University of Oxford has found that almost 90% of research reports on publicly traded companies now find that strong environmental, social and governance performance is linked to better business performance, and that sustainability practices positively influence stock performance.

Yes, but foodservice always flies under the radar a bit. It's the fast-moving consumer goods that get done over.

At the moment, yes. Oxfam has its Behind the Brands scorecard, for example. But it won't be long before similar indices are developed for companies like ours.

So you're saying ban the burgers, then?

Not at all. This isn't about meat-free menus; it's about the opportunity in plant-based options. That's what more customers say they want (though you need to make the choices exciting, so I'd steer clear of the stuffed peppers). That's what investors are increasingly looking for. And, eventually, if the Paris agreement is worth the paper it's written on, it's something governments will have to look at too.

The Catering for Sustainability report, published by Sodexo, WWF-UK and the Food Ethics Council, is available online [here](#).

Getting smart on campuses

Research by Footprint shows the challenges facing universities in cutting food waste and the innovations that are already making a difference.



Foodservice and hospitality companies throw away 920,000 tonnes of food waste every year, about 13% of which is generated in the education sector. Although there is clear agreement among governments, businesses and civil society groups that something needs to be done to cut food waste, there is little consensus on the most effective way to achieve this.

Some countries, such as France and Scotland, have pursued regulatory approaches. Others, like England, have favoured voluntary agreements. But what do caterers in higher education think?

Footprint, on behalf of The University Caterers Association (TUCO), has set about finding out. Through interviews with industry leaders, focus groups at universities, a student survey and insight from experts in the field of waste and resources, a much clearer picture has emerged of the challenges facing this sector and some of the solutions that will overcome them.

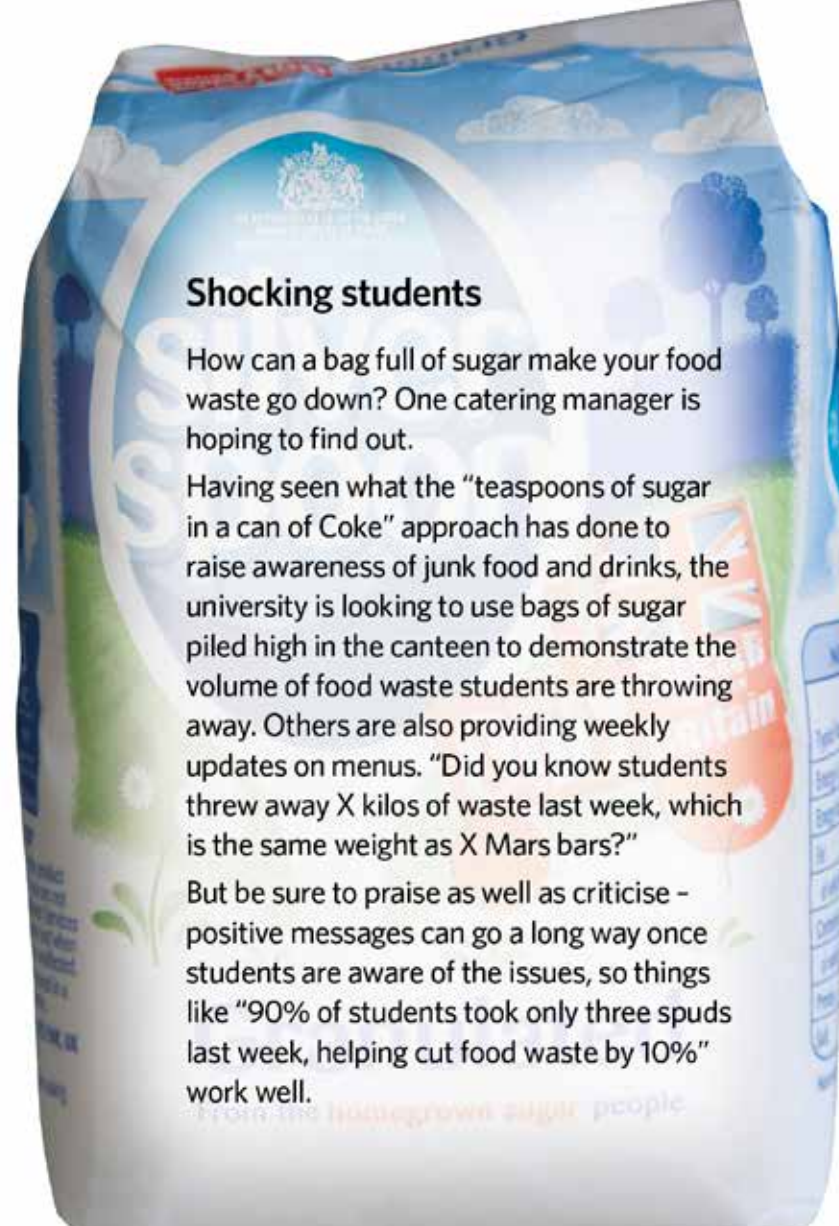
This research identifies five key challenges facing university caterers when it comes to managing – and, critically, reducing – food waste. The cost of taking action, the capture of data and the diversity of operations all create headaches. However, engagement with customers – students – is the greatest challenge of all.

Some 88% of survey respondents told us that student engagement remains a major challenge

Some 88% of survey respondents told us that student engagement remains a major challenge. Every single student surveyed said they think it's important to reduce food waste, and yet less than half (48%) eat everything on their plate. More than half (56%) felt portion sizes were too big.

For us, a clear message came back: communication is key. Those that have pushed hard to let students know that they can, for example, come back for more are seeing the benefits. On one site, food waste had been cut from 25-30kg per night to 10-15kg.

We found others applying tactics that might not work on the high street but are being accepted by students. Rather than fall into the “we’ll offer anything, any time” model, a “when it’s gone it’s gone” approach is working for this food manager running a variety of student union outlets: “This is not how I would have done it as a regional manager in a restaurant chain, so it goes against the grain a bit. But I’ve never had any complaints,” she said.



With students notoriously demanding (they have high expectations but low budgets) these kinds of tactics can be a risk. There are high-street brands often available on site providing stiff competition. A picture of where we are, what is working and what more can be done is exactly why TUCO commissioned the research. “This comprehensive breakdown has been designed to act as a guide, with top tips and case studies to drive understanding and real-life change implementation,” explains the organisation’s COO, Mike Haslin.

We found plenty of innovation at campuses around the UK with caterers looking to inspire, incentivise and even shock their customers into taking action to reduce food waste (see ‘Shocking students’). Back of house a lot of progress has already been made, with 79% of caterers telling us that staff are on board with reducing food waste.

“Staff understand the waste if you quantify it in terms of labour costs”

Again, there was a range of approaches to keeping the issue front of mind. Some respondents check the bins every so often to keep staff on their toes, while others play the financial card. “Staff understand the waste if you quantify it in terms of labour costs,” said one operations manager. “So you could say, if we hadn’t wasted those 10 burgers you’d have had an extra pair of hands for two hours today.”

The cost of food waste per tonne in the education sector is £2,100. That’s much lower than in hotels (£4,000), restaurants and quick-service outlets (both £3,500), but should be viewed in the context of the wafer-thin margins on which the catering operations at universities (and schools) are operating. Cutting food waste cuts costs, and this is a message that campaign groups and advisers have been pushing. But it’s not the only thing that will resonate with caterers who, in fact, cite environmental implications and regulation as the main drivers for taking action.

Fruits of your labour

A meticulous approach to food waste at one university has shown what can be achieved, with sales up and food waste down:



The sector is clearly looking for more guidance from government. Almost three-quarters (74%) of our respondents gave the green light to red tape provided it helped them reduce food waste. However, there are areas where the legislation already in place is creating a blockage to progress.

Caterers see the merits – ethically and socially – of food redistribution, for example, but are turned off by the perceived safety rules and risks. Several experts, however, question the validity of citing liability as a reason for not exploring distribution options. One said it is simply an excuse for inaction.

Waste contractors could certainly help, too, with 56% of respondents unhappy with the way food waste is collected. Data collection is also an area that many are struggling to come to terms with. Only 52% measure all their food waste, and yet the only way to reduce food waste is to understand how much there is, what it is and where it’s coming from.

The data also provides a clear picture of what’s working and what’s not, allowing caterers to fine-tune their front and back of house approaches to reducing food waste. The payback can be impressive, as the examples in the report show. One site has increased the items it sells by 13% and yet also cut its waste by 13% (see ‘Fruits of your labour’).

Some 95% of caterers said that sharing best practice would help them manage food waste better. And while there isn’t a silver bullet for these kinds of improvements, TUCO’s report with *Footprint* offers a glimpse of what’s possible already.



Will EU plans hold water?

As governments across Europe struggle with shortages, Brussels hopes to boost use of wastewater to irrigate crops. But are consumers ready, asks Valerie Flynn.



As the warm summer months arrive, ask yourself this: would you eat food grown on land that had been irrigated with treated wastewater? It's a question that governments across Europe will have to grapple with in the coming years.

Europe's water resources are under increasing stress, with climate change increasing the frequency and intensity of droughts, and even non-arid regions suffering from water shortages due to intensive farming, tourism and industrial activities.

Over-abstraction for irrigation in particular is one of the main threats to the EU water environment, according to the European Commission. One solution is to reuse water that has already been abstracted.

The commission hopes to boost public acceptance of this by enacting minimum standards for water reuse in law. A formal proposal, due next year, is one of the key legislative measures planned under the EU's landmark resource efficiency policy programme, the Circular Economy strategy.

In a [policy document](#) published in April, the commission confirmed that its proposal will target reuse for irrigation, and to [replenish groundwater](#). The proposed legislation won't force any country to reuse water but it will create legal conditions intended to facilitate this.

Water reuse is already accepted practice in countries such as Cyprus and Spain, where water scarcity is a longstanding problem. Some northern European countries are also getting on board, including the UK, where the Olympic Park development in east London reuses treated wastewater for toilet flushing and irrigation.

The Olympic Park is a good example of the obstacles facing would-be water recyclers. The developers of that scheme told a recent [EU study](#) that legislative uncertainty meant they had to go through every relevant agency and regulatory body – the Environment Agency, Health Protection Agency and Drinking Water Inspectorate – to gain permission to reuse water.

According to the commission, low public awareness of water recycling's benefits is one of the fundamental barriers, as is the inconsistency of the legal framework from country to country, which could inhibit trade in farm produce irrigated with recycled water.

Consumers are more than happy for recycled water to be used for firefighting and street cleaning, but using it in food production will be a much harder sell

Public acceptance of water recycling for food uses is particularly low, at least if a 2014 EU public consultation is anything to go by. Respondents were most in favour of using recycled water for uses that do not require high-quality water, such as street cleaning and firefighting. They were least in favour of uses in which reclaimed water is directly in contact with food – such as in the food industry and in irrigation of fruit and veg to be eaten raw.

The commission's consultants concluded that the results indicated “the lack of awareness of the public with regard to the possibility to adapt the quality of the reclaimed water to the intended uses”. The consultants also noted that no respondent provided any evidence of actual health or environmental problems resulting from water reuse in the EU.

The food and agriculture sectors were particularly concerned about negative public perception of the quality of reused water. More than 80% of respondents from both sectors supported legally binding minimum standards, such as those now planned by the commission, as an effective means of promoting water reuse.

The agri-food sector's concerns are likely to be examined in detail in an EU impact assessment currently under way, and again when national governments and MEPs begin examining the proposal next year.

The commission's environment department will be hoping that the environmental benefits of reuse also get their fair share of attention. Many European rivers have high levels of nitrogen and phosphorus (partly due to wastewater treatment plant discharges) and water reuse could help decrease this nutrient pollution. Water reuse is also likely to be energy efficient, requiring less energy than alternatives such as desalination and water transport.

It all seems like a sensible idea, but whether it'll wash with consumers remains to be seen.

Opening shots in a palm oil war

Suspension from the RSPO has knocked supplier IOI but it's the kicking from its customers that hurts most – and big food brands kick hard when their sustainability reputation is at risk.



The IOI Group's chief executive officer, Dato' Lee Yeow Chor, said the decision to sue the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) was a "difficult and painful one for us to take". But the pain may have only just begun for him and his colleagues.

IOI's suspension from the RSPO was announced in early April after allegations of non-compliance with certain principles and criteria within the palm oil certification scheme. The complaint focused on three units in Indonesia where illegal planting on deep peat, overplanting into unlicensed land, a failure to get proper and full licences and destruction of high conservation value areas had reportedly occurred.

It wasn't really the behaviour expected of a founding member of the RSPO, and when it became clear that IOI wasn't taking action to remedy the problems the roundtable's board of governors had no choice but to suspend the company. At that time, the RSPO was "hopeful" everything could be sorted.

IOI didn't seem overly perturbed, at least if the comments reportedly made by one senior manager were anything to go by: "The only effect is that IOI will not be able to earn CSPO [certified sustainable palm oil] premium on our oil which represents only a very small percentage (less than 0.5%) of our revenue."

IOI didn't seem too perturbed by the suspension, but then some of the world's biggest food brands began disengaging from it

But then some of the world's biggest food brands began distancing themselves from the supplier and IOI's share price fell. WWF suggested the situation had "lit a fire under them" as Kellogg, Unilever, Yum! Brands and Mars all said they were cutting back on the palm oil they buy from IOI. Half a dozen others have also done the same, according to Aidenvironment, the consultancy that raised concerns about IOI.

Most were noting that IOI's suspension from RSPO put it in breach of company policy and as a result they had already started "disengaging". "We take claims of non-compliance very seriously," says the Kellogg chief sustainability officer, Diane Holdorf.

And doesn't IOI know it – the RSPO ruling knocked the company down, but it's the kicking from customers that is hurting most. Big brands also kick hard when their corporate social responsibility reputation is at risk. The 2015 Eco Pulse study showed that the percentage of people who said they had stopped buying a product based on the environmental reputation of a manufacturer increased dramatically from 11% to 33% in the past year.

Nestlé not impressed

At the end of May Nestlé revealed that it was cutting ties with IOI; existing contracts would be phased out and the Malaysian firm wouldn't get any new ones. It was a critical turning point.

The move followed an analysis of the action plan IOI had submitted to RSPO in a bid to have its suspension lifted. The RSPO has yet to reveal what it thinks of the proposals but Nestlé was clearly unimpressed. The firm's senior corporate spokesperson, Nina Caren Kruchten, told FoodNavigator.com: "Alongside the Forest Trust, we have now carried out an assessment of IOI's action plan, which it claims is designed to deliver on the group's commitment to no-deforestation in its operations. Our conclusion is that it does not go far enough in tackling the issues raised by IOI's RSPO suspension and that Nestlé will therefore not award any new business to IOI Group with immediate effect. We will also phase out all existing contracts with an expected completion date of August 31st 2016."

There has been no official statement yet from IOI after Nestlé's findings. It is clearly feeling hard done by. In the statement announcing plans to sue the RSPO, the firm's CEO said: "We feel that we have been unfairly affected by the extent and scope of the suspension decision which was recommended by the complaints panel and subsequently endorsed by the board of RSPO."

Caught by surprise

In communications with the RSPO earlier in May there were signs that the seriousness of the suspension was (belatedly) hitting home. The group's head of sustainability, Surina Ismail, outlined a number of decisions that had been taken and urged the RSPO to lift the suspension as quickly as possible.

"Every day's delay represents a substantial disruption and loss, not only to IOI, but also the non-IOI suppliers to our downstream operations, some of whom are smallholders, the 300-plus customers of IOI many of whom have entered into forward contracts with IOI prior to the suspension and many more other users of RSPO-certified oils down the supply chain," she explained in a letter dated May 3rd 2016.

This was more than a year after Aidenvironment submitted a formal complaint to the RSPO (and it was not the first time IOI had been under the spotlight, either). Just days later, after a response from RSPO requiring quarterly progress reports for 12 months, IOI announced its decision to pursue legal action against the roundtable.

Unsurprisingly, it didn't go down well. More than 20 NGOs signed a letter to 100 global brands and traders urging them all to immediately cut ties with IOI. "Companies that continue to source from IOI are taking a major risk by associating their brand reputation with a supplier known to be connected to conflicts with communities, exploitation of workers and the ongoing clearing and burning of natural forests," said Gemma Tillack, the agribusiness campaign director of Rainforest Action Network.

The big brands they had written to have remained eerily quiet on the matter. Suspension from the RSPO they had been expecting – press statements could be prepared and company websites updated – but IOI's reaction had totally blindsided them. Let's not forget that some of these companies have had their fingers burned (or in Nestlé's case eaten) by palm oil stories in the past.

The first mover brought another surprise: Mondeléz, notoriously reluctant to talk about its suppliers, let alone name them, urged IOI to "urgently withdraw" its legal challenge. Less than a fortnight later and, as *Footprint* went to press, the Cadbury owner got its wish.

"IOI Corporation Berhad (IOI) wishes to announce that we have decided to withdraw the challenge proceeding against the RSPO Board's suspension decision in the Zurich District Court of Switzerland," explained the group's CEO, as he also committed to "voluntarily adopt the more stringent RSPO Next certification system" starting from the end of the year.

It's a welcome about turn, but the story is far from over. IOI has just submitted a quarterly report of progress against its action plan, but Aidenvironment says it's "too early" to say whether it's enough to see the suspension lifted.



Briefing: sulphite preservatives

People have got all sensitive about the chemicals. Are they a problem ingredient or simply an opportunity to push more free-from products?



Talk to me about sulphites

It was the Romans who inadvertently discovered that sulphites helped make foods last longer. They occur naturally in many things, including the human body, but because they have antioxidant and antimicrobial properties they are widely used in the food and drinks industry as an additive to preserve quality, colour and flavour.

Commercial forms

Sulphites consist of a group of sulphur-based chemicals, including sulphur dioxide (SO₂). Its commercial forms include potassium bisulphite or potassium metabisulphite; sodium bisulphite, sodium metabisulphite or sodium sulphite; and sulphur dioxide, (which is technically not a sulphite but a closely related chemical oxide). Sulphite food preservatives such as E220 and E228 are used in the UK.

What foods and drinks commonly contain higher levels of sulphites?

These include wine, cider, soft drinks, frozen seafood, sausages, dried fruits, fruit yoghurts, bottled lemon juice, fruit juice, jam and breads as well as foods containing vinegar, such as mayonnaise, pickles and sauces. Processed potatoes, potato starches and anything containing stock cubes, dried onions, dried mushrooms or dried garlic are also culprits.

Sulphites and sensitivity

Our bodies contain sulphites naturally. However some people do experience allergy-like symptoms on exposure to them, particularly asthmatics. That is rare, though – estimates put sulphite sensitivity at less than 2% of the general population.

An oft-repeated myth is that sulphites in wine cause headaches but that isn't the case. They can cause allergy and asthma-like symptoms for those who are sensitive but the idea that it's the sulphites in wine that are causing your headache is hogwash (unless you believe the *Daily Mail*).

So why the fuss?

The headache myth, a focus on allergies and the interest in what goes into processed food and drinks have all made sulphites a target for scrutiny. They occur naturally in wines but for centuries winemakers have been adding them to halt the fermentation process and prevent the grape juice from turning into vinegar.

These days more and more wine is shipped in bulk and bottled far from the vineyards, in order to reduce costs and the environmental impact. The suggestion is that very large quantities of sulphites are needed to keep such large volumes of wine stable, but there's no evidence to suggest there are more sulphites in wine – or anything else – today.

Are they unsafe in large quantities?

There is very little evidence to suggest sulphites are harmful to health – except to those who are allergic to them. These people can suffer respiratory problems on exposure and this can be very serious.

There have been fatal cases in the US and a spate in the 1980s prompted the US government to act. It now bans the addition of sulphites to all fresh fruit and vegetables that are eaten raw and to declare that all food and drink containing sulphites in quantities more than 10 parts per million have to state “contains sulphites” on the label.

Does the UK require labelling on sulphites?

Yes. EU regulations passed in 2005 require all food and drink sold to clearly show on the label if it contains sulphites at levels of more than 10mg per kilogram or 10mg per litre. They are also counted in the UK as one of the 12 potential allergens (alongside the likes of peanuts, milk, crustaceans and gluten) in the Food Information for Consumers Regulations.

Another free-from opportunity?

Currently there appears to be no official concern about sulphite levels in our food and drink but the debate has intensified in some consumer circles. Some brands have spied an opportunity in sulphite-free products.

A few winemakers are already capitalising on this, such as the French producer Les Domaines Paul Mas, which now produces and promotes about half of its white wines and a quarter of its red wines as sulphur-free.

These products will appeal to much more than the 2% of the population who suffer from allergies: 27% of Brits say they or someone else in their household avoid certain ingredients as part of a general healthy lifestyle, compared with 19% who report avoidance due to an allergy or intolerance.

What's the bottom line?

Sulphites are safe for most people and there is no evidence to suggest there are increasing amounts in our food and drink or that – even if there were – this would pose a health risk for the majority of people. If products are labelled correctly, according to the guidelines, sulphites should cause no problems.

2016 Best Brigades Finalists Revealed as Public Video Vote Opens



The eight regional finalists in Essential Cuisine's search for the UK's best chef team have been revealed, with a public vote to decide the winner now open.

Following a paper submission each entry into the competition was judged by a panel including: Chef Patron of Bird of Smithfield, Alan Bird; British Culinary Federation Chairman and Executive Chef of the Lewis Partnership, Matt Davies and Essential Cuisine Managing Director, Nigel Crane.

The final eight were then tasked with creating a short video to bring their original entry to life and showcase their kitchen camaraderie, togetherness and teamwork.

Voters now have until Midday on 27th June 2016 to go to www.bestbrigades.co.uk, watch the videos and crown a winner. Only one will receive the coveted title, £1000 cash and an exclusive menu development masterclass with a leading UK chef.

The finalists are:

Greater London – Nathan Outlaw at The Capital

The Michelin-starred restaurant Outlaw's at The Capital has been masterminded by Nathan Outlaw and Head Chef Tom Brown. They describe their kitchen environment as like playing a sport – the prep is the training, the warm up. Then the match is like the service. "You gear up for it together and are all committed and working towards the same goal." And no service is complete without a post-match pint.

Watch their video entry here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PMKE04O9x3w>

South East – Oakley Hall Hotel

A multi-national brigade serving the hotel's 2 AA rosette fine dining restaurant, bringing menu ideas from across the globe and translating them into dishes made using highly local British produce. 2016 marks their second year in contention for the title.

Watch their video entry here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EOQwURfSgwc>

South West - Lucknam Park Hotel & Spa

This multi award-winning, 30-strong brigade is responsible for the three kitchens that service the luxury hotel and spa, including the Michelin-starred 'Park' restaurant. Group lunches and market visits are a regular fixture for this chef team with everyone encouraged to contribute ideas to both the management of the kitchens as well as the menus.

Watch their video entry here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=50qfMLfgkC0>

Midlands – The Punchbowl in Lapworth

This country pub boasts a real log fire and oak beams but with a young kitchen team taking care of the menu, the food is anything but traditional. The brigade's kitchen motto is "happy people + happy food = happy customers" and with such high morale, word of their cooking skill is beginning to spread.

Watch their video entry here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7-8vWGF_QE

North East – Darcy's Brasserie at Mosborough Hall Hotel

Combining the elegant grandeur of a stately manor house with contemporary interiors, Mosborough Hall boasts within its confines a family-like brigade who pull together to create local and seasonal delights. Just like a real family, each member, from the Head Chef to the Commis, is held in the same regard and everyone gets a say on the food.

Watch their video entry here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-QZAzG9yKPw>

North West & Northern Ireland – Hilton Manchester Deansgate

A hotel chef team focussed on quality British produce and the long-term development and education of its members, this Brigade keeps the guests at one of Manchester's most iconic buildings coming back for more time and time again.

Watch their video entry here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUDzTX7IKOE>

Wales – Gemelli

Gemelli is a watchword for fine dining in Newport and, with a menu full of local specialities, this brigade uses old world culinary techniques to their advantage. With the philosophy that "beauty lies in the simple things" the Gemelli team are set on offering their guests the ultimate dining experience.

Watch their video entry here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bpBpHOuVVSs>

Scotland – The Torridon

This highland brigade can call upon its own kitchen garden and onsite farm for some of the country's finest produce. Respect for their surroundings, ingredients and each other means that the Torridon team relishes coming into work each day, and truly lives by the saying "one team, one dream".

Watch their video entry here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hD16iVpK0ms>

Nigel Crane, Managing Director for Essential Cuisine, says: "Judging was extremely difficult – such was the quality on show from our entries – but in the end, the passion, camaraderie and cooking shone through from our eight finalists. We have some fantastic videos that really bring their paper submissions to life. I urge people to visit www.bestbrigades.co.uk check out each and have their say. Regional pride is at stake!"

Essential Cuisine's class-leading range of stocks, jus, glace, demi-glace and gravy, offers kitchens the outstanding taste and performance of traditional kitchen-made product but can be brought to life in minutes not hours.

This year the company is celebrating 21 years in business. Since 1995, Essential Cuisine has been producing outstanding stock ingredients that help to unleash the creativity of chefs in all sectors, delivering that all important flavour, with absolutely no quality compromise.

For more information on the Essential Cuisine range call 01606 541490, email: advice@essentialcuisine.com

visit: www.essentialcuisine.com or find them on twitter:

www.twitter.com/@essentialcuisin