Appetite for change
Food is much more than what we eat. It shapes our lives – our health and well-being, our culture, our natural environment, our security and prosperity. Food is a true measure of our approach to life itself, as individuals and as a society.

At the National Trust, we are passionate about good food – it is integral to our past, present and future. The full story of food from plot to plate is intimately represented in the places we care for, inspiring the millions of people who visit every year. Our gardeners, chefs, tenant farmers and others have daily experience of the realities of producing and preparing food in the 21st century.

Yet we – in the Trust and in society as a whole – have taken food too much for granted. Many of us are not eating a healthy diet, let alone a sustainable one, and we have become disconnected from how food is produced. The forces that have shaped what we produce and eat are changing fast. The world faces serious challenges, most significantly from climate change, population growth, and the depletion of oil and natural resources.

In the face of these challenges, consumers, businesses, scientists and policy-makers are increasingly questioning where our food is from and how it has been produced. This has stimulated some welcome progress towards sustainable food, but it has remained a minority concern and has yet to attract a coherent and progressive approach from governments. However, recent concerns about food security provide an opportunity to make sustainable food a mainstream national and global priority.

Even with greater government leadership, it will take a huge collective effort to renew our food culture and values, as part of becoming a more sustainable society. We in the National Trust are firmly committed to playing our part. This report shares the journey the Trust has been on for the last decade to make the food we grow and serve more enjoyable, more sustainable for people and the environment, and better connected to the places we look after. We are making real progress, but we know that we have much more to do.

In our food work, we’ve been inspired and helped by many others and in return we want to share our experience. We have also identified a number of challenges facing the Trust and society, and some of the key questions that need urgent answers. By doing so, we hope to create new opportunities to work with those who share our appetite for change.

Fiona Reynolds
Director-General · National Trust
The National Trust owns 250,000 hectares of land across England, Northern Ireland and Wales, including over 1,100 kilometres of coastline.

Our main purpose is to promote and conserve places of natural and cultural importance for the benefit of the nation.

More than 200,000 hectares of our land is used to produce food, working with 1,500 tenant farmers.

Food production on our land ranges from large-scale tenant-run commercial farms to kitchen gardens, allotments and orchards.

Our 150 restaurants and tea-rooms serve over 8 million people every year.

We have a unique perspective that spans the historic, natural, social and economic impacts of food.

We have over 3.6 million members and 50,000 volunteers.

Pictured A project at Sissinghurst Castle in Kent aims to reconnect the garden with the surrounding farm landscape and provide fresh food for the restaurant.
Over the last 60 years, the world has enjoyed a period of food prosperity and relative security which has supported a rapidly rising global population. The industrialisation of agriculture, especially in developed countries, has successfully provided cheap and plentiful food – a far cry from wartime ration books. This has been achieved through heavy dependence on cheap fossil fuels and plentiful freshwater. It has had many benefits, but also costs, with serious environmental impacts and significant levels of waste, and the benefits have not been shared equitably between nations.

In many ways, food has become an anonymous commodity, traded globally in huge quantities. We have enjoyed an era of cheap food, although the prices we pay do not reflect the true costs of production. Most of us live in towns and cities and don’t encounter food production in our daily lives. We’ve become emotionally and practically disconnected from food and are losing the skills to grow and cook it. This makes it hard for us to value food and choose a healthy and sustainable diet.

As a society, we are bearing the consequences of this, with rising obesity and diet-related illnesses in the UK and other richer countries, and malnutrition in poorer countries. We’re missing important opportunities to bring people and communities together through food and to promote wider well-being.

We’re also facing a food ‘crunch’ that threatens global food security – world population and food demand are increasing at the same time as we approach the limits of our oil and water supply. Climate change is already having an impact on the world's major food-producing regions, particularly through reduced water availability. Food prices are fluctuating in response to a variety of factors. As pressures on land use rise further, there is a danger of making false choices between producing food and caring for the environment. Our long-term food security is entirely dependent on the health of our natural resources – the soil in which almost all food is grown and the water that is essential to all life. Whilst global food production may need to rise, some of the main priorities in the UK and other developed countries lie in tackling the huge levels of waste across the food chain and consuming a more sustainable diet.

It is clear that our food system will have to adapt and change radically to meet the realities of the 21st century. The UK is blessed with productive land and this will need to continue to contribute significantly to feeding people in the UK and globally. In times of economic downturn, we have a unique opportunity to create a more resilient, efficient and lower impact food system.
The food we eat is estimated to account for around 19% of UK greenhouse gas emissions.\(^2\)

Agriculture accounts for about 70% of global use of freshwater.\(^1\)

850 million people in developing countries are estimated to be malnourished while nearly 2 billion people in the developed world are overweight or obese.\(^3\)

Around a third of all food bought by consumers in the UK is thrown away – most of which could have been eaten.\(^4\)

UK consumers are spending 15% of their income on food and drink, less than half the share it took 50 years ago.\(^5\)

The average person in the UK eats 25 – 50% more protein every day than the World Health Organisation recommendation.\(^6\)
In the past, the National Trust’s focus on food was mainly on ensuring that our farmland and catering business earned money to support our charitable work. Along with much of the food industry, we produced food for, and bought it from, global commodity markets.

However, over many years, we have developed a clearer understanding of the links between our involvement with food and our work to promote and conserve the natural and historic environment for the benefit of the nation. We have learnt much from others about the importance of food in creating a more sustainable society and the role that the Trust can play in this.

In response, we are changing the way we manage our land and our business to have a much more positive impact. We have adopted a long-term approach, investing now for the future, and we are making connections between our involvement in different stages of the food chain.

In addition to our farms, gardens and restaurants, there is recreational fishing in the rivers and lakes in our care and commercial fishing on the coast; our open spaces provide a feast of wild food, such as sweet chestnuts, mushrooms and berries; we produce venison from the deer culled on our land and license wildfowl and game shoots. We seek to manage all these in ways that are consistent with our principles of conservation and provision of public access.

Each year, millions of people of all ages and from all walks of life visit the places in the Trust’s care to enjoy their beauty and tranquillity, to get involved and to be inspired. We know that people’s daily food choices are influenced by and have an impact upon our natural and cultural heritage, so our ability to reach so many people is a great opportunity. We aim to inspire people to appreciate the real value of food, the people and places involved in producing it, and the eating and enjoyment with family and friends.

Whether we’re producing, buying, selling, cooking or talking about food, there are some basic values that matter to us. Local and seasonal food is a priority for us, but only if it is also good quality and produced sustainably. By putting our values into practice, we have certain outcomes in mind – these are illustrated overleaf. They are not comprehensive, but relate closely to our practical experience and expertise, where we can make a clear contribution to a sustainable food system.

We are working to meet these standards, although they are challenging and we’ve still got work to do. We’re encouraging our tenant farmers, suppliers and individuals to join us on this journey.
Fishing for the future

‘I’ve been fishing here for a quarter of a century and I hope to continue for another quarter of a century,’ says fisherman Steven Harrison (pictured right). ‘Now that we can prepare the seafood ourselves, we get a better price for each catch, which means we can fish at sustainable levels.’

A new slipway and processing facility at Porth Meudwy fishing cove, Aberdaron, north Wales, is helping the fishermen to safeguard their future. In 2008, they won a National Trust Fine Farm Produce Award for their dressed brown crab – showing that they’re getting things right in terms of taste, quality and looking after the environment. Local property manager, Richard Neale, adds, ‘It’s been great to combine our support for local food with the need to put a range of redundant buildings back to use – and to help keep alive the local lobster and crab fishing tradition.’

The fishermen have also benefited from advice from M&J Seafood, which supplies sustainable seafood to the Trust’s catering outlets. ‘It’s been a challenge to meet the Trust’s stringent requirements, but achieving this has given us confidence that we’re on the right track,’ says Mike Berthet, Director of fish and seafood for M&J Seafood. ‘We’ve used the Trust as an example for other businesses looking to improve their sustainability criteria.’

Fine Farm Produce Awards

Our annual Fine Farm Produce Awards were launched in 2006 to recognise the best food and drink produced by National Trust tenant farmers and properties. Rob Macklin, the Trust’s Head of Agriculture, says: ‘The emphasis is very much on delicious-tasting, top-quality produce and on rewarding and supporting producers for high environmental and animal welfare standards, and high-quality processing methods. Livestock and dairy products must be certified organic or Freedom Food (RSPCA) assured. Every year the standard gets higher and it’s great to know that so many of our producers really care about what they produce.’
The whole food story, from plot to plate, is intimately represented in the places in our care and our practical experience in managing them. We are striving to produce and sell food that benefits people and the environment – our goals are set out here. Achieving these is challenging and we will continue to work closely with our tenant farmers, suppliers, staff, volunteers, supporters and other partners.

A wide variety of high-quality food is produced on our land and from the coast and freshwater in our care, including:

- Beef and lamb from extensively grazed grasslands;
- High-quality grains for milling and brewing;
- Milk and dairy from productive pastures;
- Fish and seafood from healthy stocks, caught sensitively;
- Fruit and vegetables grown in fields on a large scale;
- Venison from wild and parkland deer;
- Vegetables and fruit from kitchen gardens and orchards;
- Wild food from hedgerows and woodlands.
Everyone benefits from consuming the high quality food that we and our tenant farmers produce and sell, which has a clear origin and rewards high standards of production. As part of this:

- People can buy food direct from Trust farmers or close to where it was produced through local shops, pubs and markets;
- Supermarket shoppers can buy food from the Trust’s estate via farmers working together to supply the mass market;
- Farmers and other producers receive a fair price for the food they sell;
- Our chefs have the skills and knowledge to buy and cook seasonal food from local producers;
- Food waste is minimised and composted;
- People have access to the countryside and the places where their food is grown;
- People can visit the National Trust to learn about food and get involved in growing and cooking their own;
- Local communities have the space and skills to grow their own food;
- Tea, coffee and other global foods are fairly traded and from a known origin.

This food is produced in environmentally responsible ways, so that:

- Farming practices protect soil and water;
- Wildlife habitats, landscapes and historic features are conserved;
- Diverse animal breeds and plant varieties are chosen that suit the local environment;
- Animals are looked after to high welfare standards;
- Energy, water, fertilisers and chemicals are used efficiently;
- Waste is minimised and managed effectively.
Our farmed landscapes bear the traces of change over thousands of years. The most recent revolution took place after the Second World War. The drive to increase production was encouraged by subsidies and achieved by new industrial technologies, including machinery, agro-chemistry and animal feeds.

Modern agriculture successfully provided cheap and plentiful food for consumers and greater profits for many in the food industry, but at a cost. High inputs of fuel, chemicals, fertiliser and feed were needed to increase production and these had a dramatic impact on soil and water quality. Vital wildlife habitats such as hedgerows were removed to accommodate machinery, and the farm workforce declined. Today, food production is no longer regarded in isolation, and great efforts are being made to manage its impact on the natural environment and rural communities.

The National Trust’s approach to farming has followed a similar pattern. Most of our land is managed by tenant farmers, who decide how they farm. Ten years ago, we took stock of the way that we value our land and recognised the role that farming plays in achieving our long-term conservation objectives. Since then, we have worked more closely in partnership with our tenant farmers to support their husbandry of the land. We’re keen to encourage viable farms with high standards of food production, environmental management and animal welfare. To help achieve this, our specialist farm team has provided whole farm planning advice to hundreds of our farms.

Over the last decade, we’ve made some real progress. The majority of our farms are in environmental stewardship schemes and meet recognised farm assurance standards. It is vital that farmers achieving these high standards are rewarded with better, fairer prices. We believe that traceability is key, so that buyers and consumers know the provenance of their food. We are working with several groups of farmers to market their produce to supermarkets or catering businesses. Lots of farmers now sell produce directly to consumers via box schemes, farm shops and markets.

However, this is just the start. Our next steps are: to support quality food production at a bigger, mainstream scale; to prepare for a future with little oil and scarce water; and to ensure our land and farmers are able to grow what society needs for a sustainable and healthy diet.

**Over the next decade, we will:**

- continue to work with our farmers to adopt environmentally responsible farming systems, with a new focus on energy, water efficiency and renewable resources;
- promote the importance of traditional grass-fed livestock production not only because it delivers more sustainable meat, but also benefits nature and landscape conservation;
- expand our work to reward producers who make food that tastes great and is sustainably grown, through new partnerships that connect high-street shoppers with the food from our farms and by raising the profile of our Fine Farm Produce Awards.
Over 90% (185,000 ha) of the National Trust’s farmland is leased to 1,500 tenant farmers, including 700 whole farms. The rest is managed directly by Trust staff and graziers.

The majority of Trust land is managed by extensive grazing with sheep and cattle.

Over 7% of our farmers have converted to organic production. All our in-hand farms meet Freedom Food standards for animal welfare.

Farmers produce a huge variety of food on Trust land, mostly cattle, sheep, arable and dairy with some field vegetables, poultry and pigs.

Around 75% of Trust farms are in environmental stewardship schemes, which reward the conservation of nature and the wider environment, and provision of public access to the countryside.
Grass-fed meat from the Lake District

‘Our farm is quite small, so to make a profit we need to add value to each animal, rather than having lots of animals,’ says Caroline Watson (pictured right), tenant at Yew Tree Farm in the Lake District since 2002. ‘So we specialise in rearing traditional breeds – Herdwick sheep and Belted Galloway cattle – on 660 acres of mixed grassland and heather fell. We were pleased to find that the animals convert low-quality grazing into high-quality meat! It takes longer than intensive farming, but we don’t need to use fertilisers or additional feed, and we get a fantastic end product that our customers love. This way of farming is good for the animals’ welfare and good for the land. We help protect water quality by not using any inputs and prevent flooding downstream by looking after wet areas and not digging ditches or drains.’ Globally, greenhouse gas emissions from meat production are a big contributor to climate change. Yet farms where the animals are fed grass and managed sensitively in the natural environment have a much lower impact than animals from intensive farms that are fed grains.

Wicken Fen: space to breathe for people and wildlife

Food production is just one of the demands that we make of our land and seas. Wildlife, water, clean air and green space are also vital. Chris Soans, property manager at Wicken Fen in Cambridgeshire, says ‘We’re ten years into our 100-year Vision to create a more sustainable landscape between here and Cambridge (about 10 miles away) – at the moment it’s dominated by intensive agriculture and new housing. Land drainage for agriculture has led to the loss of more than two metres of peat soil in some parts over the years, which threatens the land’s long-term capability to produce food. We’d like to see the area managed more sensitively to make space for wildlife and people alongside food production. Wicken Fen is one of the only remaining fragments of undrained Fen and is home to some very special and rare wildlife. These species simply need more space if they are going to survive. So we’re buying some pieces of land when they become available and introducing extensive grazing systems using our own and local farmers’ cattle, which are used to produce meat. Food production is part of our long-term Vision – we need to find new creative approaches to land management to safeguard soil and wildlife, improve green space and grow food.’
Dolaucothi sheep farmers working together

On the Trust’s Dolaucothi estate in south Wales, eight sheep farmers have joined forces to sell their top-quality lamb to a supermarket chain. Arwyn Davies, one of the farmers (pictured right), says, ‘When lamb prices were really low a few years ago, we got together and used our common links with the Trust to market our produce as Dolaucothi lamb. Now we sell directly to Sainsbury’s – they love the traceability and quality of our meat, and our Freedom Food accreditation guarantees animal welfare standards. The eight of us meet monthly to talk things over – this really helps, as farming can be a very isolated way of life. Farmers don’t usually talk to each other very much about their own business! We have traditional and rare breeds such as Welsh Mountain, Beulah Speckle Faced and Balwen, and we use a local processor just 12 miles away. Winning the Fine Farm Produce Award three years in a row is a real boost – the Trust’s brand sends a powerful message to consumers of quality food they can trust.’

Wimpole estate: testing the ground

‘Being the Trust’s only in-hand lowland mixed farm gives us a responsibility and opportunity to lead by example,’ says Richard Morris (pictured right), the Trust’s Farm Manager on the Wimpole Estate in Cambridgeshire, which includes 240 hectares of arable crops, parkland and rare breeds of livestock. ‘We are experimenting and testing new ideas to demonstrate that farming at a commercial scale can be environmentally sustainable and make money. We’re converting to organic production, trying out different cultivation methods in varying ground conditions to prepare seedbeds and different seed mixes to see what works. There’s a good market for certified organic cereals at the moment, so I hope it’ll be a success. It means we’ll become a truly mixed farm. Having the backing of the Trust has made this easier. Hopefully, others can learn from our experience without having to take the same risks. We’re also working to reduce our carbon footprint – starting by measuring the carbon stored in the land and what’s emitted from our operations – so we can work out where we need to make changes. The next step will be to look at our water footprint, it is a hugely valuable and essential resource. We need to protect it and think about the way the farm uses water into the future.’
In the last 15 years, the amount of land used to grow fruit and vegetables in the UK has declined by a fifth. Orchards have been destroyed and we’ve lost many varieties of fruit and vegetables bred and adapted over centuries. We now import around 90% of our fruit and 40% of our vegetables into the UK.7

The places in our care have a long history of horticulture, particularly the grand estates with their kitchen gardens, glass-houses and orchards. Yet over the years, many of our walled gardens have been neglected or even turned into car-parks – a clear demonstration of changing values!

More recently, we’ve begun to realise how valuable these places are and how much we can learn from the past for the future. We’ve already restored many of our historic kitchen gardens and brought them back into production with the help of the local community – others will follow. We’re caring for a huge variety of fruit and vegetables that might otherwise be lost forever.

We’ve really come to appreciate the benefits of growing and eating seasonally. It helps to conserve the natural and cultural heritage of our gardens and orchards, and it brings them to life for our visitors. It is great for our chefs to serve the produce and to let their customers know that it was picked there that day.

In future, we want to see more fruit and vegetables grown on National Trust land – not just in the kitchen gardens, and not just by our staff but by local people too. We want to garden in ways that improve the soil, let wildlife thrive and use a minimum of water and energy. We are responding to climate change, and the different growing conditions it is bringing, by adapting the kinds of plants that we grow and the way that we grow them.

**Over the next decade, we will:**

- lead a joint initiative, with help from Natural England, to restore traditional orchards, supporting communities and partner organisations in creating space for fruit and wildlife;
- actively support new farmers who want to grow fruit and vegetables, when tenancies become available;
- invest in and promote greener gardening practices, including organic methods, on our land and with our visitors.
26 of our historic kitchen gardens are in production and supply their restaurants and tea-rooms with fresh fruit and vegetables.

We own over a hundred traditional orchards producing a huge variety of fruit and nuts.

We grow in ways that reduce our environmental impact, with careful use of water, using peat-free compost and with minimal use of artificial chemicals.

We have 145 walled gardens, many with huge potential to be restored.
Cotehele: the mother orchard

‘There’s a long history of orchards and market gardening here in the Tamar Valley,’ says Chris Groves, Orchards Officer on the Cotehele estate in south-east Cornwall. ‘It’s amazing how traditional fruit varieties are part of this area’s heritage – they’re adapted to the local climate and named after local people and places. In the 17th century, a lot of the apples were used to make cider to sell to the ships that sailed from Plymouth.’ Two-thirds of orchards have disappeared nationwide since 1950, and along with them rich ecosystems, precious genetic diversity, and tangible links to our past. ‘We’re trying to help reverse that trend,’ says Chris. ‘Orchards have so much to offer and people can really relate to them. In the winter of 2007/8, we planted a new mother orchard with 300 apples trees from 120 varieties. Graft material for the trees was donated by Mary Martin and James Evans, a local couple who’ve worked for over thirty years to save the Tamar Valley’s orchards. It’s great to be able to help look after these traditional varieties and give future generations something special to enjoy.’

Knightshayes: a truly varied menu

‘Growing unusual varieties of fruit and vegetables makes perfect sense for us,’ says Penny Woollams, property manager at Knightshayes Court in Devon. ‘It helps to conserve those varieties for the future, but also brings to life the history of the Victorian kitchen garden and family who owned it, and makes our restaurant menu quite unique! We restored the kitchen garden in 2002; it had been unused since the 1960s. It’s been hugely successful across the board – in terms of conservation, the experience for our visitors and as a business. Our gardeners and chefs work together closely to plan what to grow – it’s taken a lot of effort to match up all the different things we want to achieve. We have to make sure the garden looks beautiful and the restaurant can use the produce to create an interesting and popular menu. Our visitors usually go to the kitchen garden before they come to the restaurant, so they know to expect something different – like purple carrots and yellow tomatoes!’
Coleshill Organics: feeding the community

‘We love being right at the heart of the community, producing fresh, great-tasting fruit and vegetables for local people,’ says Sonia Oliver at Coleshill Organics, a tenant near Swindon. ‘We run a weekly box scheme, go to farmers’ markets and supply produce to local shops, pubs and schools, all within 25 miles of the Coleshill Estate. We have a shop in the walled garden, and our open-door policy means that people can come and see the produce being grown. We had over 1,000 schoolchildren here last year, picking and eating their way around the garden! Equally important to us is growing organically – our customers really value knowing not only where their food is from but how it’s been grown. We employ about 10 local people and we run apprenticeships to help new starters learn the tricks of the trade.’

Brockhampton: the fruits of the estate

‘After the foot and mouth disease outbreak in 2001, we were looking for ways to support our tenant farmers,’ says Les Rogers, property manager at the Brockhampton Estate in Herefordshire. ‘We wanted to help create farm businesses that were sustainable – not only for the environment, but for our tenants and their livelihoods. They now supply cakes to our tea-room, rear Hereford beef for local Trust restaurants and produce about 14 different jams and chutneys from the estate’s fruit and vegetables! The preserves have been incredibly popular in our tea-room and shop, and other local shops are now selling them too. Thanks to this business, we’ve got our 100 acres of orchards back into full production after years of neglect, which is great to see. Most recently, I’ve been working closely with the gardener at the Trust’s Hanbury Hall nearby and they’re growing lots of produce for us – they’re even creating a new growing area to keep up with demand.’
In the food industry, providing large quantities at low cost has often meant low standards in both the quality of the food and the way it has been produced. Convenience, speed and price have been valued over quality, taste, traceability and sustainability.

It is only in the last few years that we’ve been able to explain to National Trust customers where their food comes from and how it was produced. Before that, we weren’t buying much locally produced food or thinking enough about the environment, animal welfare standards or fair trade.

In recent years, we have made a lot of changes and our goal now is to offer food that’s fresh, tastes good and has been sustainably produced. We want to make the food that we serve an integral part of a good day out with the Trust, helping to tell the story of the place alongside the historic buildings or the landscape. We want to reflect the spirit of the people who lived and worked there and the global influences on the food that they ate. Through food, we want to engage and inspire people, and to demonstrate our values and ambitions as an organisation.

We have made great strides forward, but it hasn’t been easy and we’ve got much more to do. Our chefs and other staff have had to develop new skills and knowledge to source and prepare food in line with our new standards. They’re working with local producers and suppliers, negotiating contracts, planning seasonal menus, and talking more to customers and the media.

As a national organisation operating at a local level, we’ve often found it hard to get consistent supplies that meet our needs and standards. Although we aim to buy locally produced food where possible, sometimes we need to look further afield. Many suppliers, whether local or national, have weak links with producers, so they cannot tell us where the food comes from or how it has been produced. The infrastructure needed to support local food economies, such as abattoirs and distribution hubs, is often missing.

Yet overall, our experience gives us confidence that a successful catering business can also be sustainable – we’ve managed to make big changes while still making a profit. We’re working with producers, suppliers and others in the food industry to encourage higher standards and to match up supply and demand.

**Over the next decade, we will:**
- continue to implement our sustainable food standards in our business. We are looking to extend this to include sourcing flour and cereals grown to high standards in the UK, working with bakery specialists;
- do more to promote the origin and story of the food in our shops and restaurants to our customers;
- help our chefs and keen cooks in the community improve their skills, and seek support to realise our ambition to open a National Trust chef school.
The National Trust owns and manages over 150 tea-rooms and restaurants.

We serve over 4.5 million cups of ethically traded tea and coffee every year.

We are one of the largest catering businesses in the country preparing fresh food on the premises.

Our catering operation had a turnover of £34 million in 2007/8 and in 2007 raised over £7 million for our charitable work.

We use over half a million eggs every year – all free range and Freedom Food assured.
Raising our game

We have introduced food sustainability standards into our catering in phases, starting with the ingredients that people could most easily recognise and now we’re moving on to the more difficult commodity foods. Lynda Brewer, the Trust’s Catering Development Manager, explains: ‘We buy our tea, coffee and hot chocolate through national suppliers, so we know that it’s all in line with the Ethical Trading Initiative Base Code. Our sugar is either British or Fairtrade certified. Our fish and seafood is sourced in line with guidance from the Marine Conservation Society to make sure it’s fished sensitively from healthy stocks. All the dairy produce, meat and eggs we use are from the UK and wherever possible, locally sourced. Our eggs are all also free range, independently assured by the RSPCA’s Freedom Food scheme. We are aiming for all our meat to reach this standard too, or to be certified organic, although we haven’t achieved this yet in all our restaurants. Our fruit and vegetables are sourced in season and from local producers, although we often have problems finding suppliers who can meet our standards. My next big challenge is sourcing more sustainable bakery products to bake the perfect cake!’

Houghton Mill: the quest for a sustainable scone

‘We wanted to offer our visitors a real taste of the mill,’ says Phil O’Donoghue, property manager at Houghton Mill in Cambridgeshire. ‘So we take wheat grown on the Trust’s Wimpole Estate nearby, we grind it in the watermill, and then use the flour to make scones. People love them – the scones taste great, they’re a genuine local product with a brilliant story to tell about the mill’s history and its connection with the local area. Visitors can talk to our volunteer trainee millers and our tea-room staff love being able to offer something unique. It’s really unusual in catering to know where your flour is from and how it’s been grown, and we use only British sugar, butter and milk. The power used to grind the flour and do the baking is all generated by the waterwheel, so it’s a very sustainable scone! We just have to try not to eat too many of them…’ It can be a real challenge to find baking ingredients like flour that are traceable to their origin and sustainably produced – so Houghton Mill’s scones are a special case.

Volunteer miller Peter Sawford collects the flour, to be sold on site.
Powis Castle: inspiring young chefs

“Our young chefs bring a new energy to the team. We all share an enthusiasm and a passion for food; it’s what the Trust is all about,” says Simon Ebrey, catering manager at Powis Castle. Andrew Turner (pictured right), aged 22, and Mandy Jones, aged 20, started work at the Castle in spring 2008, after studying catering at nearby Coleg Powys. “They’re creating exciting new dishes for the restaurant, using the best of local and seasonal produce,” says Simon. “We’re really making an effort to work with local producers and suppliers, and this seems to be inspiring other new chefs too. Local students are asking to do their work experience with us – we had an excellent 15-year-old lad here last year. It’s great to see young people coming into the business with so much energy and loads of great ideas.” Unfortunately, not all catering students share the same passion for local and seasonal food – the Trust is committed to providing training and inspiration to help change this.

Scotney ale: local supplies for the Trust’s shops

Robert Wicks (pictured right, standing, with hop farmer Ian Strang) is director of the Westerham Brewery at the Trust’s Grange Farm in Kent: “We brew our beer using hops from the Trust’s hop garden at nearby Scotney Castle and local malt. We sell a range of beers through Trust shops and restaurants, mainly in the south east, although now we’re taking orders from around the country. Soon we’ll be selling the Trust’s first own-brand beer! Entering our beer for a Fine Farm Produce Award provided a good incentive to improve environmental standards in the hop gardens. It was great to win the award, and our link to the Trust has really helped us to market our products elsewhere. We’re pleased to be able to give something back – the Scotney hop gardens were previously struggling to make money, but we’ve been able to invest profits from the beer sales to help get them back on track and now they are thriving.”
As a society, we’ve become distanced from our food and the role it can play in improving our quality of life. We now know that there are lots of good reasons to connect to our food. It can inspire us to lead greener lifestyles and help us to connect to nature and our cultural heritage. Growing and eating good food is a great way to enjoy physical and mental health, to bring communities together and help people to gain vital skills, confidence and experience.

Realising this, increasing numbers of people are asking where their food is from and how it has been produced. Many want to take back control over their food and try their hand at growing their own. Allotments and other growing spaces that were previously neglected are now in great demand.

In the Trust, we’re realising the potential we have to help people to connect to food, whether by getting your hands dirty in the soil, picking blackberries, learning how to make butter or tasting fresh, seasonal vegetables. In some places, food has been central to our activities for several decades, while in other places it has been largely overlooked. Yet the hundreds of places and huge areas of countryside in our care provide millions of people with amazing opportunities to experience food and farming first hand; our website, magazine and coverage in the media reach millions more. Whether volunteers, schoolchildren, community groups or visitors, the enthusiasm and energy of the people who get involved with food through the Trust make our places live and breathe.

The challenge for us ahead is to make the most of this potential, working in partnership with others. We want to help make sure that good food is not just a niche market, but that everyone has access to healthy, sustainable food, regardless of their income or background. We want to help people to gain the skills needed to buy and cook good food, or to try growing their own.

**Over the next decade, we will:**

- encourage people to appreciate and enjoy food, with a national campaign to inspire and help people to grow their own food and to eat more seasonal and locally produced food;
- create 1,000 new growing spaces on National Trust land by 2012 for communities in cities, towns and villages across the country;
- explore options for community-supported agriculture on our land when farm tenancies become available.
Our Guardianship scheme, in which Trust properties build close relationships with local schools, through practical outdoor activities, is now 20 years old.

We already have community growing spaces – from allotments to kitchen gardens – at over 50 locations around the country.

We had over 15 million visits to our pay-for-entry sites in 2007/8 and an estimated 100 million visits to our open spaces each year.

There are over 100 schools in Guardianship schemes with local Trust properties, with food being a popular theme for their activities.
Gibside: growing confidence

‘It’s great to see local people getting so much out of our kitchen garden,’ says Mick Wilkes, property manager at Gibside, near Gateshead. ‘I don’t just mean the fresh fruit and vegetables – many people get a boost in self-esteem, a sense of achievement and a feeling of team work, as well as enjoying the fresh air, physical exercise and beautiful surroundings.’ Adults with learning disabilities, psychiatric patients and people who are socially excluded all come to Gibside to tend their patch, along with children from a number of local schools. ‘The impact is astonishing – on people’s health and well-being generally, but also helping some people to get back into education and employment. We’ve got a waiting list for plots, so we’re looking for funding to expand the project and set up a social enterprise. The idea is that the proceeds from the sales of fruit and vegetables will go back into training and development. We want to make local and seasonal food accessible to more and more people.’

Minnowburn: green space for those without a garden

‘The waiting list for local council plots is three to five years, so the Trust opening a garden in Minnowburn excited me. The wardens are so enthusiastic and helpful. At last I’ll be able to practise my gardening skills for real.’ Miriam Turley (pictured right with Tom McVeigh) was one of the first to take advantage of the new community garden on Trust land in south Belfast. The garden is just getting started, with the aim of providing people who have no space at home the opportunity grow their own fresh produce. They’ll benefit from healthy fruit and vegetables, exercise, a sense of community and a connection with the environment, right on the edge of the city. The garden will be as diverse as its gardeners – who include young families, unemployed people and retirees from different ethnic, cultural and social backgrounds. The National Trust’s Belfast staff will give guidance and advice, as well as using the garden as an educational tool to promote the benefits of ‘growing your own’ to local schools and health trusts.
Getting your hands dirty

Calke Abbey: learning through food

‘We’ve had children coming here from St Hardulph’s primary school for around 13 years now,’ says Alison Thornhill (pictured right with visiting children), learning and events officer at Calke Abbey in Derbyshire. ‘They come from just a few miles down the road to spend time with our gardener and chef learning how to grow and cook food. It all links in to the national curriculum but it’s great to see the way the kids have taken it beyond this – they’ve created their own growing area in the school grounds, set up cookery and gardening clubs, and managed to get their school kitchens reopened. The health side of it is really important too – they learn how to make healthy meals using fresh fruit and vegetables.’

Lacock Abbey: digging for victory

‘The allotments were created after the Second World War to provide food for the table,’ says Graham Heard, property manager of Lacock Abbey in Wiltshire. ‘Local people have kept this tradition alive, growing their own food for over 60 years now. They also keep the walled garden in working order – we couldn’t have done this without them!’

Hughenden Manor: growing communities

‘I enjoy growing and cooking peas in the Walled Garden so much that I now grow them in my garden at home,’ says Ian, a blind member of a group of adults with learning and other disabilities. The disused garden at Hughenden Manor, on the edge of High Wycombe in Buckinghamshire, was brought back to life in 2006 for local community groups to grow their own fruit and vegetables. ‘The whole project has been set up and run by volunteers,’ says Alison Mascarenhas, a volunteer herself who has coordinated the work for over three years. ‘There is a lively programme for all families in the area and community groups who visit the garden include adults with learning disabilities and physical disabilities, children from a Pupil Referral Unit, fathers with preschool children and Asian women from Carers Support Group (pictured right). Another group of adults studying for a qualification in organic gardening come and work in the garden and supply produce to the Trust’s restaurant on site. One of our plans is to do “outreach gardening” – encouraging the community groups to grow veg where they are.’
Food for the 21st century

The journey the National Trust is taking towards more sustainable food is shared by many in the UK and globally. We know that it can take time to understand the issues and shift to new ways of working. However, the world is changing quickly and the negative impacts of our food system are already being felt, from climate change to rising obesity. We need to work together as a society to create a more resilient, efficient and low-impact food system that is fit for the decades ahead. We all have a vital part to play in making this happen, whether individuals, businesses, civil society or Government.

The National Trust exists to promote the conservation of places of natural and cultural importance for the benefit of the nation. We know that managing our land and business as part of a more sustainable food system will help us to fulfil this purpose. We aim to use the places in our care and our wider influence to inspire others to join in and take action. We have a clear sense of direction for the future, coupled with a determination to act more quickly and in more places from now on.

From our experience to date, we’ve found three major challenges that also apply to society as a whole. We do not have all the answers, but we are committed to making a positive contribution, working in partnership with others to find solutions.
Respecting gardeners, farmers and cooks

Providing a sustainable and healthy diet for everyone relies critically on restoring food knowledge and skills across society. These skills have been overlooked for many decades and we have become dependent on others to feed us.

The National Trust wants to support effectively the hundreds of gardeners and cooks who we employ, the hundreds of producers who farm our land, and the thousands more who volunteer their time. We also have an opportunity to help develop the nation’s food skills beyond our staff and volunteers.

We have the potential to reconnect millions of people to food, when visiting Trust properties, when at home, or out and about. By working with other community, gardening, catering and farming organisations which share this ambition, the Trust can help to renew the mainstream food culture of the UK:

- How can we give people the space and the skills to grow their own food?
- How can we boost the skills, confidence and rewards of our chefs to source and serve healthy, sustainable and great-tasting food?
- How can we make our farms more accessible to stimulate people’s interest in how their food is produced?
2

Giving food identity and value

The global, centralised food system makes it very hard for businesses and consumers to tell where food comes from and how it has been produced. There is little incentive to pay more for an anonymous product, and the real human and environmental costs of production are rarely reflected in the price of food.

A future of globally scarce oil and water and rising population is likely to bring an end to this era of very cheap food. This creates an opportunity for a new approach that places a greater value on food, rewarding sustainable production and fair trade.

While these global changes may be inevitable, people’s values, attitudes and behaviour will not adjust overnight, particularly in times of economic difficulty. The renewed interest in food, from community champions to celebrity chefs, is starting to revive our food culture in the UK, but it is not yet mainstream. This will take time and there are some difficult questions to address, particularly:

- How can the price of food reflect the true costs of producing it, while ensuring a healthy and sustainable diet remains affordable for everyone?
- How can local and regional food systems be developed that match supply to demand?
- How can consumers and chefs understand and trust the provenance and sustainability of the food they are buying?
Facing up to the food crunch

Many of the challenges in moving towards a sustainable food system are well defined – in particular, adapting to climate change and weaning ourselves off the cheap oil and plentiful water that we have taken for granted until now.

However, meeting these challenges is a huge task and it is not yet clear what the priorities should be. There is a lack of coherence in Government policy on food, and there are powerful vested interests in different parts of society. There are quick and easy wins, such as reducing waste and increasing efficiency along the whole food chain.

Other solutions, and the evidence to support them, are often lacking and need further research and development. There are some key questions that the Government needs to answer to help make tangible progress in the UK:

- How do individuals and businesses know what constitutes a healthy and sustainable diet?
- How can farmers be encouraged and supported in reducing their greenhouse gas emissions, particularly from fuel, fertilisers, livestock and soil?
- What is the water footprint of the food we eat and the priorities for reducing it?
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Food is much more than what we eat; it shapes our lives. Yet we – in the National Trust and in society as a whole – have taken food too much for granted. The world faces serious challenges, including from climate change, population growth and the depletion of oil and natural resources. It will take a huge collective effort to renew our food culture and values, as part of becoming a more sustainable society.

This report shares the journey the National Trust has been on to make the food that we produce and serve more enjoyable, more sustainable and better connected to the places we look after. We’ve been inspired and helped by others; in sharing our experiences, we hope to create new opportunities to work with those who share our appetite for change.

We would welcome your feedback – please contact us using the details below.

If you require this information in alternative formats please call 020 7799 4541 or email externalaffairs@nationaltrust.org.uk