

DR. CAROLINE LUCAS

Green Party  
*for the South East of England*

Vice Chancellor,  
University of Sussex  
Sussex House,  
Brighton,  
BN1 9RH

January 18<sup>th</sup> 2008

Dear Vice Chancellor,

During the week of January 21<sup>st</sup> students from Sussex University will be launching a film they have produced called 'Food for US'. The aim of the film is to promote locally produced and sustainable food across campus, whilst highlighting some of the health, social and environmental benefits of a radical shift in catering practices across the University.

As an MEP for the area that includes Sussex University and someone with a significant political, professional and personal interest in food production, I would like to take this opportunity to urge you to support the aims of 'Food for US' and provide some context about why I am lending my support to the initiative.

For the first time in human history, more than half of humanity is urban. By 2025, an estimated two out of three people in the world will live in urban areas. Whilst, traditionally, urban areas have been fed by their hinterland, that's no longer the case for most European cities. Once recent report has estimated that, of the almost 7 million tonnes of food consumed in London in 2000, as much as 80% of it was imported.

The decline of local, independent shops, and the replacement of thriving high streets by huge out-of-town supermarkets is again driven primarily by the food industry. In the UK, the 5 largest retail chains account for 80% of the market, and exert a virtual monopoly on many towns and cities. While this trend is less dominant overall in many other EU countries, the statistics tell much the same story - the top 12 European grocery retailers account for almost one third of the total European grocery retail market. The fact that millions in cities across Europe live in food poverty in an age of abundance is yet another of the grim ironies of today's food production and distribution system. It's a form of social exclusion that is linked to the daily choices many of us make when we enter a supermarket.

Food miles in Britain are at the high end of the levels across Europe and they're also indicative of a growing trend. Food accounts for around 30% of UK freight mileage and in the past 20 years food-related tonne-kilometres have doubled. The rapid growth in the volume of food transported by air is of particular concern, since air travel is the fastest growing source of greenhouse gas emissions. 13% of air-freighted produce is food - making it the largest air-freighted sector. The extraordinary inefficiency of this in energy terms is clear when we realise that, for example, for every calorie of iceberg lettuce, flown in from Los Angeles, we use 127 calories of fuel.

Both imports and exports of food have roughly tripled over the last 20 years. Not only that, but in many cases those imports and exports are actually of the same products. In 2002 Britain imported 240,000 tonnes of pork in the same year that we exported 195,000 tonnes of pork. We imported 125,000 tonnes of lamb, while exporting 102,000 tonnes, and - even more bizarrely, we imported 61,400 tonnes of poultry meat from the Netherlands while exporting 33,100 tonnes of poultry meat to the Netherlands in the same year!

But this globalisation of our food system isn't only bad for the environment. It's bad for consumers, for farmers, for our health and for our local economies. Consumers often have less real choice; poorer people

are left in so-called 'food-deserts'; we have epidemics of obesity and ill-health among our children; and new research suggests that the more food miles fruit and vegetables have clocked up, the more their vitamin content is reduced.

'Food for US' explores some of these problems and also focuses on the solutions. There are a growing number of examples of local communities working together to reclaim control over their food system, and to build healthier, more sustainable food chains. And while certainly some of these are in the UK, and even in East Sussex, it does appear that it is many of the other countries of the EU who are taking a lead. High quality, affordable, available and plentiful organic and local food are routinely available in many cities in Denmark, Sweden, Austria and Germany in a way that is simply not yet the case in most of the UK. It seems clear that the prevalence of markets and food production/distribution systems that prioritise local food in these countries hasn't happened by some accident of fate. It has happened as a result of deliberate cultural, economic and political choices.

Students at Sussex University are committed to ethical and environmental issues and want their place of learning to become an example of best practice food policy. 'Food for US' is just the start of a campaign to revolutionise catering on campus and develop links with local growers, producers and retailers. I very much hope you will support the measures needed to put sustainable food at the heart of learning at Sussex University and will work with students to make choices that prioritise local food.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Caroline Lucas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Caroline Lucas - Green Party MEP for South East England.