

the new  
**optimists**forum



**conversations:  
content analysis**

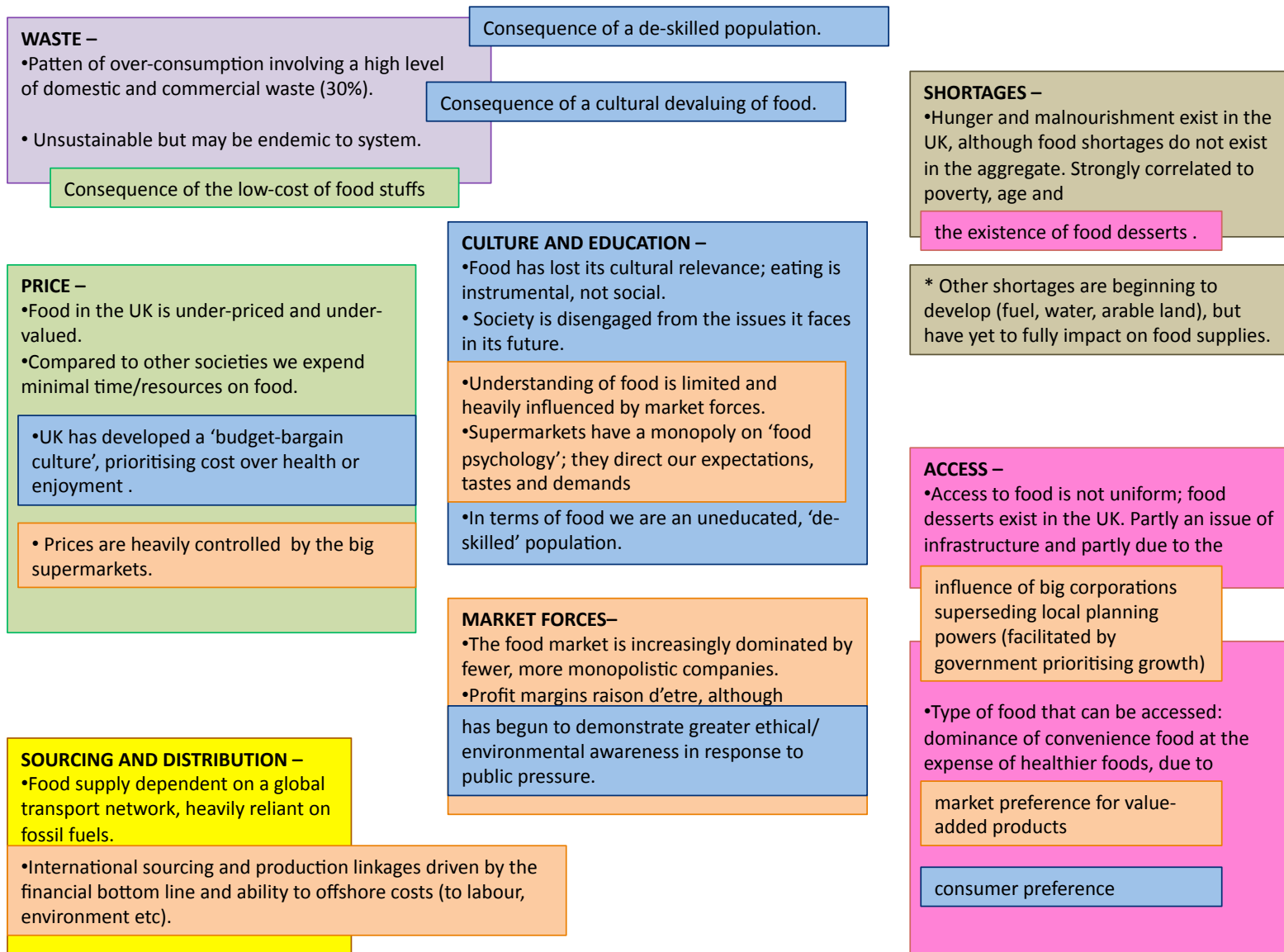
ELLIE RICHARDS  
JANUARY 2012

forum event of 2nd November 2011

## DRIVERS & TRENDS

<b>EDUCATION AND CULTURE</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The role of the government as an engine of social change, its commitment to re-skilling and re-educating the population and the impact this has on their relationship with food.</li><li>2. Level of social engagement (extent to which the public is able to internalise the broader issues and their willingness to respond).</li><li>3. The emergence and impact of bottom-up movements (agricultural, revolutionary, educational etc).</li></ol>
<b>MARKET FORCES</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Direction and strength of public influence (dependent on shifts in perception, cultural evolution, effectiveness of food education).</li><li>2. Balance of power between the market and government and shifts in governmental priorities.</li><li>3. Impacts of broader global changes on financial bottom line (and where the new profit margin can be found).</li></ol>
<b>SOURCING AND DISTRIBUTION</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The impact of global population expansion and change in the relative wealth of Britain (in particular versus BRIC countries) and how this may threaten our position as a net importer.</li><li>2. The impact of price increase consequent of fuel depletion on global distribution networks.</li><li>3. Climate change and its effect on the availability and price of global food products.</li><li>4. Availability of local food products (in context of domestic population expansion and an increasingly high-urban population).</li><li>5. Increased public sensitivity to environmental impacts and how this may problematise international productive and distributive networks.</li></ol>
<b>ACCESS</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. How cultural preferences evolve and the impact this has on the types of food available.</li><li>2. How our understanding of the types of person worst affected evolves and how the government uses this understanding.</li></ol>
<b>SHORTAGES</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Climate change, in particular projected increase in temperature and subsequent shortages of water and farmable land.</li><li>2. Depletion of fossil fuels, the availability and viability of alternative fuel sources and the impact of these on food production.</li><li>3. Scientific innovation to mitigate food shortages and the public's reception of these (GM crops).</li><li>4. How our understanding of the types of person worst affected evolves and how the government uses this understanding.</li><li>5. Demographic change (the expansion of the ageing population and associated pressure on resources and the labour force) and the effects of domestic population expansion.</li></ol>
<b>WASTE</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Affect of price increases on consumer behaviour (waste reduction as coping mechanism) and perceived increase in value of food.</li><li>2. Attempts to re-skill the population and the effectiveness of these measures.</li><li>3. Scientific innovation, reducing cost of wastage by repurposing waste (production of biofuels).</li></ol>
<b>PRICE</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The impact of resource scarcity on the viability of the bargain product.</li><li>2. Evolution of food culture and the value that is placed on food as a result.</li></ol>

# FOOD ISSUES



# SOLUTIONS

## EDUCATION AND CULTURE

1. Reintroducing 'food education' into the public education system. Not only in terms of food preparation but also agriculture. Possibility of integrating agriculture more fully by introducing gardens/allotments to school grounds.
2. Extending community growing projects (implies extending governmental commitment and more long-term funding). Would include training schemes, encourage information sharing and expand public access to the produce. Dual benefit in increasing public capacity and reinvigorating public interest. (Food no longer instrumental but social).

## SOURCING AND DISTRIBUTION

1. Use of alternative energy sources in transport, for example, electrifying transport system.
2. Redeveloping agricultural land in the West Midlands to replace international sources. Potential use of vertical farming to mitigate land constraints.
3. 'Green buildings': reconceptualising the role of the architect. Creating buildings that are carbon neutral, energy producing and ultimately self-sufficient.
4. Development of community growing projects and encouragement of local exchange networks to reduce import demands.

## ACCESS

1. Development of community growing projects and encouragement of local exchange networks to increase access to nutritional foodstuffs.
2. 'Green buildings': reconceptualising the role of the architect. Creating buildings that are carbon neutral, energy producing and ultimately self-sufficient.

## SHORTAGES

1. Use of GM crops (dependent on government commitment to move R&D from commercial crops to staples and to protect patents. Also reliant on attitudinal change in the general public – argued this change is already occurring ).
2. Return to traditional storage methods (such as warehousing) to compensate for temporary but extreme food shortages.
3. Community growing projects to increase the availability of healthy foodstuffs, reducing nutritional deficiencies.

## WASTE

1. Repurposing of waste, for example, utility of energy-rich food waste in the production of bio-fuels.
2. Education of the population (for example, vs. current reliance on use-by-dates).

On 2nd November 2011, ten people met at Minor Weir and Willis in Perry Barr, Birmingham.

They were taking part in the first New Optimists Forum event. There was both plenary and group conversations.

**Kate Cooper** organised and led the Forum. The conversations were facilitated by **Norman Leet**, and there was live social media reporting by **Nick Booth, Jon Bounds and Gavin Wray** of Podnosh.

The conversations were also recorded and transcribed. The transcription, along with the social media reporting, was analysed by **Ellie Richards**, with the guidance of **Professor Frances O'Brien** of Warwick Business School. Her simple brief was to summarise the content of the conversations in diagrammatic form. This document comprises her work.

**Nicci MacLeod** of the Centre for Forensic Linguistics at Aston University has also made a computational linguistic analysis of the conversations which, with her expert commentary, is in another document.

Neither Nicci nor Ellie were present at the Forum. Frances aided Norman with the facilitation.

The participants at this Forum were (in alphabetical order by surname):

**David Bull**, Birmingham City Council's development strategist.

**Dr Rosemary Collier**, an entomologist and Director of the Warwick Crop Centre.

**Professor Liz Dowler**, a public health nutritionist and Professor of Sociology at the University of Warwick.

**Professor Peter Fryer**, Head of the School of Chemical Engineering at the University of Birmingham.

**Dr Gareth Griffiths**, a biochemist at Aston University with research interests in lipid chemistry/biochemistry and their applications.

**Professor Helen Griffiths**, Professor of Biomedical Sciences at Aston University and Executive Dean. Also founder of the Aston Research Centre for Healthy Ageing.

**Professor Ian Nabney**, Professor of Computer Science at Aston University.

**Professor Jim Parle**, Professor of Primary Care at Birmingham Medical School, also allotment holder and father of two professional chefs.

**Dr Eugenio Sanchez-Moran**, a plant scientist based in the School of Biosciences at the University of Birmingham.

**Professor Hanifa Shah** an IT strategist who is also Associate Dean (Research) in the Faculty of Technology, Engineering and the Environment at Birmingham City University.



We are grateful to the following organisations for their support of the New Optimists Forum:

