



the new
optimistsforum

PATHWAYS TO FAMINE

content analysis of the forum on
9th February 2012
PART ONE

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MARCH 2012

	ISSUES	TRENDS	DRIVERS
P A T H W A Y S T O F A M I N E	Food deserts expand as ACCESS to (and DISTRIBUTION of) <i>nutritional</i> foodstuffs becomes increasingly limited and erratic.	A heavily fossil-fuel dependent transport network is unsustainable under rapid resource depletion and associated oil-price spikes; food distribution is restricted and sporadic.	Failure by the government to invest in transport infrastructure and alternative energy sources.
		Small local businesses, vulnerable to economic shocks, fall into decline. Sections of the population lacking resources or mobility struggle to access food.	Failure by local authorities to exercise planning powers to cultivate an even distribution of food retailers throughout the city.
		A collapse in the demand for nutritional foodstuffs causes a shift in the supply side.	A society disinterested in 'good food'.
	Food supplies are compromised as global food shortages undercut traditional SOURCING.	Under the strains of climate change, agricultural output cannot meet the demands of a rapidly expanding global population.	Technology to increase output without exacerbating land or resource pressures remains underdeveloped.
		International suppliers turn to alternative markets in emerging economies.	Suppliers deterred by an over-regulated UK market consequent of the 'hyperselective' British consumer.
		Decline in international supply is left uncompensated by local sources.	Local sources incapable of fully substituting for international ones. Estimated an intensively farmed area of 400% the size of Birmingham the minimum requirement to feed the urban population.
		(Nutritional) FOOD POVERTY deepens as individuals are denied either the means or the resources to maintain a healthy diet.	Broader conditions of poverty and scarcity undermine the individual's ability to meet their daily nutritional needs.
	Individuals lack either the skills or the motivation to adopt a healthier diet.		Unsustainable food production methods and food shortages result in limited and over-priced foodstuffs.
			Education system fails to re-skill population.

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A divided **SOCIETY** develops in which food is a source of conflict instead of unity.

Social tiering develops between the haves and have-nots, with the associated increases in crime, civic unrest etc.

Scarcity and concomitant price spikes and inequitable access breed a new form of social division.

Technological advancements (e.g. processed foods and freezers) remove the individual from food production processes.

Society becomes increasingly disengaged with food production and preparation.

Under conditions of scarcity, and with the limited range of food stuffs available, educational initiatives fail to reignite public interest.

With the development of the virtual world, food is no longer an integral part of social interaction.

EDUCATIONAL failures enable damaging and unsustainable **BEHAVIOUR**

Unsustainable level of wastage (40%) and patterns of over-consumption maintained.

Conditioned preference for uniformity in foodstuffs leading to consumer hyperselectivity.

Lack of understanding of food safety involving high levels of wastage, e.g. the use-by-date system.

Consumption informed not by calorific needs but by cultural expectations of excess.

A weak **GOVERNMENT** fails to influence the individual's behaviour, or to shape the broader context in which the individual acts.

Government unable to influence individual behaviour.

Lack of understanding producing misdirected government initiatives e.g. healthy eating campaigns ignoring fresh produce.

Failure to involve public in policy formation leading to a lack of public ownership of policy outcomes.

Government fails to affect broader context.

Government too heavily influenced by vested market forces.

Government fails to invest sufficient resources in the relevant technologies, infrastructure and initiatives.

On 9th February 2012, six people met over dinner supplied by the CIC *Change Kitchen* at Woodbourne in Birmingham.

They came to discuss a topic that had arisen at the New Optimists Forum event on 2nd November, namely food deserts and poverty in Birmingham.

The conversation was facilitated by **Norman Leet**, and there was live social media reporting by **Steph Jennings**. The conversation was 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.

This document *Pathways to Famine* is one half of Ellie's analysis. The other half, *Pathways to Feast* is also published as a pdf (search 'pathways to feast' at <http://newoptimists.com>).

The six participants in this round-table discussion were:

Dr Lucy Bastin from Aston University. With a first degree in zoology, and her PhD in the population ecology of urban plants, she now applies spatial analysis techniques to health, environmental and socio-demographic research challenges.

Jayne Bradley opens the first city food park in Birmingham, *Edible Eastside* this spring. She was also one of the team to bid successfully for the redevelopment of Harborne's Clock Tower; they're committed to transform it into a food hub with a dedicated community school of artisan cookery — she's the person developing the new CIC, called *Kitchen*, which will open in March 2013.

Nick Booth is the founder of Podnosh, the social media consultancy whose aim is "to change the way the public and the public sector talk to each other".

Kate Cooper is the founder of the New Optimists Forum and the Linus Publishing Company, the latter initially set up to publish the book *The New Optimists: Scientists View Tomorrow's World and What It Means to Us* to which over 80 regional scientists contributed. She's also CEO of Science Forward Ltd, the not-for-profit company which owns Linus Publishing and the New Optimists brand.

Parveen Mehta is the Operations Director of Minor Weir & Willis, a fruit and vegetable importer and distributor to the major supermarkets, based in Perry Barr in Birmingham. MMW is also increasingly a grower of supplies.

Jim Parle, Professor of Primary Care at Birmingham Medical School, also allotment holder and father of two professional chefs. It was his video interview at the November Forum event that sparked the recent wide debate on food poverty issues in the city.

Sandy Taylor is Head of Sustainability at Birmingham City Council.



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