

Follow the Carrot

Could expanding free school meals boost the UK food and farming economy?

Barbara Crowther
Children's Food Campaign, Sustain



Impact
on Urban
Health

K



About us



Alliance of over 100 organisations for better food and farming, together advocating food and agriculture policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, improve the working and living environment, enrich society and culture and promote equity.

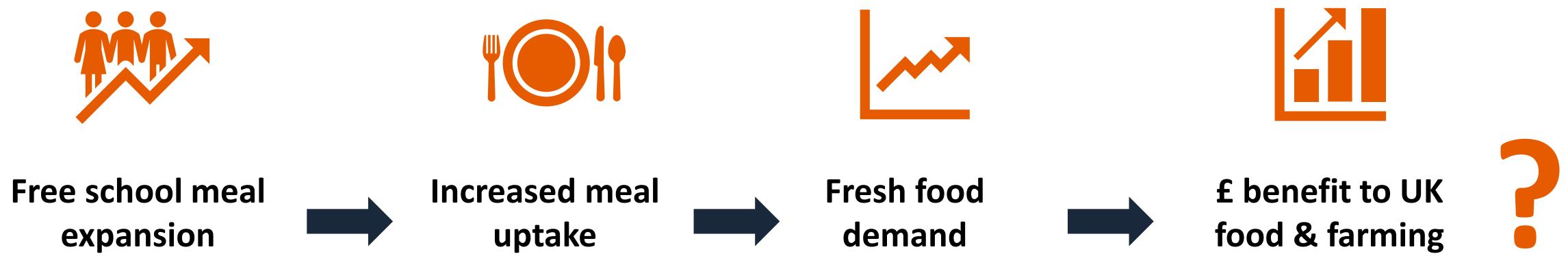
www.sustainweb.org



Children's Food Campaign

Bringing together children's and health organisations, professional bodies, academics, unions and school food experts to campaign for policy changes so that all children can easily eat sustainable and healthy food. We have parent ambassadors and campaigns including School Food For All and Recipe for Change

We set out to understand...



And what **conditions** are needed to make it happen?

School meal expansion scenarios

September
2026!

Scenario 1

Universal
Credit

+70 million
more meals

Scenario 2

Universal
Primary FSM

+220 million
more meals

Scenario 3

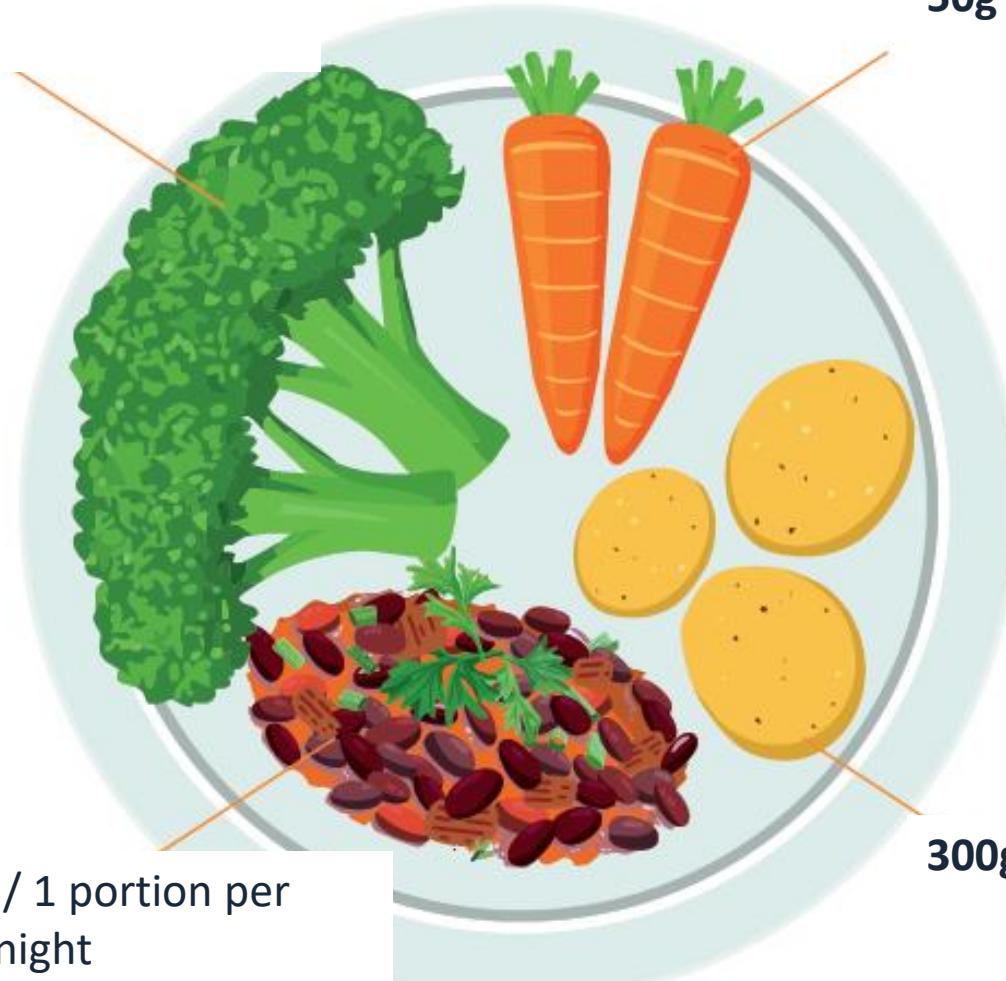
Universal FSM

+540 million
more meals

Maximising the British plate ...

50g / 2 portions per fortnight

50g / 2 portions per fortnight



82g / 1 portion per fortnight

300g/ 4 portions per fortnight

Maximising the British plate ...



Maximising the British plate ...



Universal expansion of free school meals in England could unlock a £600 million boost for UK farmers and growers

This is more than just putting food on plates – it's a chance to:

- 🥕 **Improve children's health and education**
- 🥦 **Strengthen sustainable British farming and protect our climate**
- 🥔 **Deliver long-term benefits for the UK economy**



Unlocking potential for...

- Greater use of **British vegetables and plant proteins** on school plates
- Secure, long-term markets for farmers and SMEs
- Reduced reliance on imports, stronger resilience to shocks
- Better diets for children and climate-aligned menus



Conditions for success



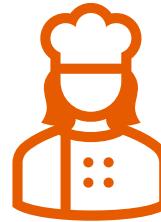
Fair and adequate funding

Reform of school food funding to reflect the real cost of quality British ingredients, including 'less and better' British meat and more beans and pulses.



Flexible, accessible procurement

Establishment of contracting systems that enable SME participation and bolster local supply networks through simpler, more transparent processes.



Investment in facilities and skills

Delivery of centrally designated capital investment for kitchen and supply chain infrastructure that supports local and regional supply networks and sourcing.



Standards & monitoring

Promotion of domestic & sustainable sourcing within SFS review, establish regular monitoring, and align schools with GBS targets.

Recommendations

- 1. Review and update school food funding** to reflect the true cost of quality and invest in supply chain infrastructure
- 2. Update school food standards and enforce compliance** to ensure nutritious, sustainable food in every school
- 3. Scale up proven local and regional models** that deliver benefits for both children and farmers
- 4. Join up strategies across health, farming and the economy** to maximise the impact of public food spending
- 5. Unlock growth for UK producers** by continuing expansion towards universal free school meals



Photo credit: BeanMeals

Thank you!

Contact:

Barbara@sustainweb.org

Report available at:

<https://www.sustainweb.org/reports/sep25-follow-the-carrot/>

