



## **PRESS RELEASE**

7 March 2007

### **KNIVES ARE OUT IN FOOD DEBATE**

Experts have claimed that the British people were healthier during rationing in World War II than in today's well-supplied society. Many of us seem to have lost the necessary skills to ensure that we eat well, or perhaps we don't have the right information. Should the consumer be king or are we just too ignorant about food to be trusted with making vital decisions about our diet?

Current social problems of poor diet, obesity and public ignorance about food will be fiercely debated when Gareth Edwards-Jones, Professor of Agriculture and Land-Use Studies at the University of Wales, Bangor and Michelle Harrison, Director of the Henley Centre, propose the controversial motion that "Consumers cannot be left to themselves to decide what to eat" on Monday 12 March.

The opposing view will be stated by Professor of Food Economics at Reading University Bruce Traill, and Tom MacMillan, Executive Director of the Food

Ethics Council, who will argue that consumers don't need experts to tell them how to spend their money.

Executive director of the Food Ethics Council, Tom MacMillan, said: "Rather than giving up on consumers we should be giving them more autonomy. Lots of people don't eat well, of course, but that's not because they're stupid. Even if we know what we're meant to eat, what we actually buy depends on all sorts of factors, including prices, promotions and advertising, which are heavily shaped by supermarkets, the supply chain and government. The way to solve this isn't to offer consumers more choice - it's to help citizens get political about what they eat."

The debate, which will take place in front of an audience of policy makers, civil servants, students and the general public, is the second in a series organised by the UK Research Councils' Rural Economy and Land Use Programme to mark the Festival of Social Science and National Science and Engineering week, under the title "Power and Responsibility: Who decides? You decide!"

Professor Philip Lowe, Director of the Rural Economy and Land Use Programme added: "This is a time of major changes and challenges for the countryside and every issue has at least two sides – often more. We want more people to get involved in discussing and thinking about science, how it can be used to address social and technological issues, and how it is used to make policy."

The other debates in the series are:

- “The environment would be fine, if only scientists were in charge, at 6 pm on Friday 9 March, with Bill Sutherland, the Miriam Rothschild Professor of Conservation Biology at Cambridge University, and Royal Society for the Protection of Birds’ Director of Conservation Policy, Mark Avery v Susan Owens, Professor of Environment and Policy, Cambridge University and Andy Stirling, Professorial Fellow at the University of Sussex Science Policy Research Unit.
- “Farmers should be responsible for controlling livestock diseases” at 6 pm on Wednesday 14 March with Professor Jeff Waage, from the Centre for Environmental Policy at Imperial College and Sean Rickard, Senior Lecturer in Business Economics at Cranfield University v Michael Winter, Professor of Rural Policy and Director of the Centre for Rural Research at Exeter University and John Lloyd Jones, Chairman of the Countryside Council for Wales.

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Notes for editors:

- 1 The debate will take place at 6 pm on Monday 12 March at the Royal Academy of Engineering, 29 Great Peter Street, London and members of the press are invited to attend. To attend, please contact ESRC conference desk tel 020 8542 8223 or [esrc@vistaevents.co.uk](mailto:esrc@vistaevents.co.uk).

- 2 The Rural Economy and Land Use Programme is a UK-wide research programme carrying out interdisciplinary research on the multiple challenges facing rural areas. It is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, the Biotechnical and Biological Sciences Research Council and the Natural Environmental Research Council, with additional funding from the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department and the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.
- 3 The Festival of Social Science is organised by the Economic and Social Research Council, and runs from March 9th to 18th, alongside National Science and Engineering Week. It celebrates some of the very best British social science research, as well as highlighting the ways in which social science makes a difference to everyday lives. Press releases detailing some of the varied events are available at [www.esrcfestival.ac.uk](http://www.esrcfestival.ac.uk) or for more information please contact the ESRC Press Office on 01793 413032 or via e-mail: [alexandra.saxon@esrc.ac.uk](mailto:alexandra.saxon@esrc.ac.uk)
- 4 National Science and Engineering Week (formerly National Science Week) is an opportunity for people of all ages to take part in science, engineering and technology activities. National Science and Engineering Week is coordinated by the British Association for the Advancement of Science, funded by the Department of Trade & Industry and working in partnership with the Engineering and Technology Board. See <http://www.the-ba.net/the-ba/Events/NSEW/>.

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