



The APPG on Vegetarianism and Veganism

C/O Christina Rees MP Office

House of Commons

London SW1A 0AA

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
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Dear Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP

We are writing on behalf of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Vegetarianism and Veganism.

At a recent meeting, we discussed food security among vulnerable vegans and vegetarians (veg*ns) in the UK.

Very little research focuses on the food security of individuals with specific dietary requirements because of their beliefs. An abundant supply of non-veg*n, -halal, or -kosher food may be available to an individual in a certain setting, but the question arises as to whether the individual would deem themselves as food secure, and how others around them would view their food security?

The meeting heard from three speakers. Jen Elford from The Vegetarian Society spoke on a successful food bank project that The Vegetarian Society has been working on. With this, the charity has equipped food banks in various UK cities with vegan meal boxes. The meals aim to be healthy, vegan alternatives to favourite meals for families and offer a guaranteed plant-based meal from a food bank – and have been very well received. There has been outstanding feedback from non-vegetarian users who have not eaten meals made vegetarian like this before, and the majority say that they would make meals like this again.

Nathaniel Harper, an acting Board member of the Worthing Vegan Food Bank discussed how easily vegans can be catered for in a food bank, and, with little additional effort, vegan food can be provided for coeliacs and diabetics. Additionally, Nathaniel discussed how their food bank provides many alternatives to popular items, such as non-dairy milk, which generally last longer on the shelf, and are suitable for more individuals, such as those who are lactose intolerant.

We also heard from Yasmine El-Gabry from Vegetarian for Life, who discussed the experiences of recipients of food boxes sent out during the COVID-19 pandemic. Experiences included recipients being given boxes of food that contained little to no vegetables or fruits, tinned foods containing dairy or meat, making the box unsuitable for their diet, and individuals being left to find their own way to eat when already clinically vulnerable. When individuals had the opportunity to apply for these food boxes, there was an option to log any dietary requirements. Unfortunately, standardised boxes did not take these requirements into consideration, although service users had been asked about allergies or cultural/religious beliefs.

Furthermore, local authorities were expected to use their resources to provide food in line with cultural/religious beliefs and allergies, which many were unaware of, or did not have the means to do so.¹

There is no doubt that we need to care for and protect these individuals in our society. There need to be further provisions to ensure that this does not happen again. Preventing additional people from illness related to food scarcity issues would also save costs, and reduce pressures on the NHS.

These issues have been highlighted by both the COVID-19 pandemic and the increased number of individuals using food banks. Food bank usage is understood to have increased because of job losses or loss of income from the pandemic, as well as increasing food costs.^{2 3}

The Trussell Trust reports that in April 2020, food bank usage increased by 89% from the same month the previous year⁴. More than half of the individuals now using food banks have never used a food bank before. Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the government sent over 1 million food boxes to the most vulnerable residents who lacked access to food essentials. 2.1 million residents qualified for government food boxes⁵. The need for food from a food bank or similar scheme continues for many across the country and it is not anticipated that this need will decline significantly in the near future.

In your capacity as Communities Secretary and Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, we ask that you would:

- Create guidelines that would guarantee a vegan food box in the event that government sponsored food boxes are administered in the future.
- Launch a review into understanding the impact of providing government food boxes that did not take dietary requirements into consideration.
- Reinstate the Food Charities Grant to support food banks and provide additional financial support/training when plant-based proteins are given, to incentivise the health and environmental benefits of the same, as well as widening the inclusivity of foods provided.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Christina Rees, Chair of the APPG

¹<https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Shielding%20packages%20for%20FAQs%20for%20local%20authorities.pdf>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/food-statistics-pocketbook/food-statistics-in-your-pocket-prices-and-expenditure>

³ <https://www.trusselltrust.org/2020/05/01/coalition-call/#:~:text=59%25%20of%20the%20increase%20in,12%25%20is%20because%20of%20sickness.>

⁴ https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/06/APRIL-Data-briefing_external.pdf

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/over-1-million-food-boxes-delivered-to-those-most-at-risk-from-coronavirus>