



Key findings from the mid-term review of the Global Food Security Programme

Background

1. The Global Food Security programme coordinates research supported by its programme partners across government departments, the devolved administrations, Research Councils and the Technology Strategy Board. It builds on the partners' existing activities, aiming to add value to their current and future investments, and complementing rather than replacing their individual strategies. It brings additional coherence by acting as a focus for joint activities and helps to ensure alignment of individual activities with shared goals. It also provides a platform for working in partnership with a wide variety of stakeholders and users, both internationally and in the UK.
2. Our vision is to integrate, coordinate and disseminate research that will be influential in informing policy and practice and will support food security goals. As stated in our refreshed strategy: 'We will raise the profile of the food security challenge, providing leadership and coordinating our efforts in this area. We will be dynamic in identifying and responding to current and future challenges, leveraging existing funding, and co-designing new multidisciplinary research programmes. We will encourage innovation, help to translate existing knowledge and provide a focus for UK contributions to wider international efforts.'
3. In spring 2014, a light-touch Mid-Term Review of the Global Food Security Programme (GFS) was conducted, based upon 162 responses to a stakeholder questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to a wide range of GFS stakeholders, including those in industry, academia, government, non-governmental organisations, and funding organisations, and was also made publically available on the GFS website. Its objectives were: 1) To explore the extent to which GFS has achieved added value through different mechanisms; 2) To capture 'softer' programme impacts for communication and evaluation purposes; and 3) To help shape the future strategic direction of the programme.

Summary of key findings

4. Over three quarters of participants felt that GFS had influenced their practices, strategies or investments, or was likely to in the future. The key means through which GFS has achieved this has been through providing a food security focal point, a forum for coordination and collaboration, and through horizon scanning and synthesis of knowledge, which have directly or indirectly shaped priorities, structures and processes.
5. The majority of participants felt that GFS had considerably provided thought leadership and influence on food security issues; moderately to considerably raised awareness of the food security challenge; and moderately improved coordination alignment and synergy across stakeholders, moved the food security agenda forward through

workshops, scoping studies and publications, and provided a vehicle for the delivery of stakeholder strategies and priorities.

6. A key finding from the study was that GFS is highly valued by its stakeholders, and a number of quotes are provided in **Figure 1** to illustrate this. To further add value it would benefit from greater clarity of its aims, further outreach across a broader set of stakeholders, and stronger communication of what it has achieved. Participants highlighted that the programme may be constrained in achieving its aims by funding, the extent of political support and the differing priorities of partners.
7. The Review highlighted that there are some aspects of GFS which require further attention or clarification, and these areas can be broadly categorised into five themes: (1) Stakeholder engagement; (2) Evidence of activities and impacts; (3) Scoping vs action; (4) International engagement; and (5) Aims of the programme. **Table 1** provides a brief description of each of these themes, alongside the GFS response in terms of how this is being addressed, or will be addressed in future.
8. The GFS programme and its partners would like to formally thank all of those people who took the time to provide feedback. It has been very valuable in informing our thinking, activities and strategic direction, and provided a suite of case studies for our annual impact report, to be published in early 2015.

Figure 1. Illustrative quotes from stakeholders on the value of the GFS programme



Table 1. Key themes from the GFS mid-term review.

No.	Theme	Topic	GFS Response
(1)	Stakeholder engagement	GFS could engage with a broader range of stakeholders, with differing perspectives on the food security challenge.	<p>GFS partners' interests and strategic priorities span the whole food system, from food production through to demand and waste, and encouraging sustainable, nutritious diets. Consequently we engage with a very broad stakeholder community through a variety of means including through the GFS Champion, digital communications (e.g. the blog), public dialogue activities, and workshops.</p> <p>GFS will endeavour to further strengthen its engagement with stakeholders through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A refreshed communications strategy, to identify key content, stakeholder groups and appropriate communication channels; • Website redesign, to better represent the full spectrum of GFS interests and stakeholder engagement activities; • The establishment of a public panel to further engage with the public; • Encouraging blog posts from a greater range of stakeholders, which offers a diverse and stimulating forum for debate; • Better targeted external communications, to broaden media reach beyond those self-selecting for agricultural or science interests.
(2)	Evidence of activities and impacts	GFS should increase the visibility and evidence of its activities and impacts.	<p>GFS will address this through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An annual impact report, highlighting GFS activities and impact; • Allocating time at GFS events to highlight the aims of the programme and example activities and impacts; • A refresh of our communications strategy. All digital channels and dynamic communications will increase content about GFS activities and events; • GFS programme partners will be encouraged to further highlight cross-funder GFS activities that relate back to the single, shared high-level strategy, agreed across all partners.
(3)	Scoping vs. action	GFS does very well in terms of scoping exercises - evidence of how this has translated into action would be helpful.	<p>GFS partners are strongly involved in GFS scoping activities, alongside a diverse range of other public, private and third sector stakeholders. This helps shape partner and stakeholder strategies and activities. For example, a GFS workshop in 2012 on agricultural engineering set the ground work for a joint call on this topic between Innovate UK, Defra, BBSRC, and Scottish Government. GFS will capture examples of these impacts (including from this review) and better communicate them. It should be noted that the GFS programme does not have its own research budget, rather it facilitates greater coordination and collaboration of existing spend across partners. Other notable examples of our role in facilitating research are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GFS 'Soil and Rhizosphere Interactions for Sustainable Agri-Ecosystems' call¹ (GFS-SARISA) (BBSRC, NERC, Defra); • Belmont forum/FACCE-JPI CRA on food security and land use change² (BBSRC, ESRC, NERC); • 'Understanding the Challenges of the Food System' call (ESRC, FSA), which followed the GFS workshop on 'Global food systems and UK imports: resilience, safety, and security'³.

¹ 'Soil and rhizosphere interactions for sustainable agriculture (GFS-SARISA)'. Available at: <http://www.foodsecurity.ac.uk/programme/activities/2013-gfs-sarisa.html>

² 'Food security and land use change'. Available at: <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/partnerships/belmont/foodsecurity/>

³ 'Global food systems and UK imports: resilience, safety, and security'. Discussions from the ESRC Public Policy Seminar, 30 March 2012. Available at: www.foodsecurity.ac.uk/assets/pdfs/gfs-and-uk-food-imports.pdf

			We are also in the process of facilitating a new collaborative research programme on the challenge of resilience of the UK food system in a global context, drawing directly on our '100 questions' activities ⁴ . These have helped to identify the top questions for different stakeholders, which we have used to prioritise our activities, both collectively and individually.
(4)	International engagement	GFS could engage more internationally and better communicate evidence of its international work.	<p>GFS is further strengthening its international engagement following the refresh of its strategy. Examples of international activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of an international temperate agriculture network; • Facilitating development of the Belmont Forum/FACCE-JPI food security and land use programme; • Input to the initiative on Global Open Data for Agriculture and Nutrition; • Leading on mapping of G20 sustainable agriculture research priorities; • Development of a UK-US taskforce on resilience of the global food system to extreme weather events; • International activities of the GFS 'Champion'. Recent examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advising G20 framework for linking food and nutrition to economic growth in the developing world; - Advisory committee member for the EU Scientific Programme for Expo 2015; - Chairing a roundtable on 'nexus' thinking in New Delhi, India <p>Visibility of international activities will be enhanced through the refreshed communications strategy and annual impact report. GFS will continue to monitor opportunities to work with food exporting nations, emerging economies and developing countries.</p>
(5)	Aims of the programme	Greater clarity would be helpful on the aims and objectives of GFS.	<p>The GFS Programme recently refreshed its strategy and clarified its vision: "To integrate, coordinate and disseminate research that will be influential in informing policy and practice and will support food security goals. We will raise the profile of the food security challenge, providing leadership and coordinating our efforts in this area. We will be dynamic in identifying and responding to current and future challenges, leveraging existing funding, and co-designing new multidisciplinary research programmes. We will encourage innovation, help to translate existing knowledge and provide a focus for UK contributions to wider international efforts".⁵</p> <p>Findings of the GFS Mid-Term Review revealed that GFS stakeholders primarily value the programme for its role in stakeholder coordination and collaboration; bringing together diverse stakeholders from academia, government, industry and NGOs, increasing coherence and alignment, and building/strengthening connections. In addition they valued its systems approach to food security spanning many disciplines. This will continue to be a key aspect of the programme moving forward.</p>

⁴ 'Priority research questions for the UK food system'. Available at: <http://www.foodsecurity.ac.uk/assets/pdfs/priority-research-questions-uk-food-system.pdf>

⁵ 'Global Food Security, Strategic Plan 2011-2016', Available at: <http://www.foodsecurity.ac.uk/assets/pdfs/gfs-strategic-plan.pdf>, p.2