

# Boris Johnson unveils ‘grow for Britain’ plan

British farmers urged to put more resources into producing fruit and vegetables to help ease cost of living and food threat from Ukraine war

By Tony Diver, WHITEHALL CORRESPONDENT, DAILY TELEGRAPH - 10 June 2022

Boris Johnson is set to unveil a “grow for Britain” strategy and tell farmers to produce more fruit and veg, in the wake of record inflation.

In a major announcement expected on Monday, the Prime Minister is poised to unveil the country's first food strategy for 75 years.

It is set to call for changes to planning rules to make it easier to convert land into farms, announce that poultry workers will be eligible for seasonal migrant visas, and propose that schools, prisons and hospitals be required to offer a vegan option.

The plans were delayed following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, in order to put more emphasis on food security.

It comes amid a spiralling cost of living crisis, with inflation set to surpass 10 per cent this year, according to Bank of England figures.

Andrew Bailey, the Bank of England governor, has already warned of “apocalyptic” food prices and interest rates are set to rise again to 1.25 per cent.

Mr Johnson made his first visit to Tiverton and Honiton in Devon on Friday, one of two seats facing by-elections later this month. The cost of living is expected to be a key factor in the vote.

The Prime Minister and Rishi Sunak, the Chancellor, were set to make a joint economic speech next week, but it has now been delayed.

Both are under pressure from senior Conservatives to do more to ease the cost of living, with Cabinet ministers understood to be backing calls to cut fuel duty further.

Amid attempts to reset his premiership in the wake of the confidence vote, Mr Johnson will also propose a major Brexit Bill in Parliament on Monday, allowing the Government to override parts of the Northern Ireland Protocol.

Later in the day, he will make a speech on technology and innovation and its contribution to economic growth.

## **'Cost of food has real consequences'**

The food strategy, which has been leaked to The Telegraph, will say farmers need to be more productive and that planning rules should be relaxed to make it easier to convert land into farms to grow fruit and vegetables.

It will be announced during a joint visit by Mr Johnson and George Eustice, the Environment Secretary, to the south-west of England.

The strategy document seen by The Telegraph states that “the cost of food has real consequences for people across the country” and that ministers are working “to address poverty in the round as we learn to live with recent events and manage the impact of cost of living pressures”.

It added: “The strategy comes at a time of significant increases in food prices, largely as a result of energy prices and exacerbated by events in Ukraine, which is very challenging for people across the country.

“We are engaging closely with the food industry to understand price impacts and any mitigating measures.”

The document points out that currently, 57 per cent of British produce comes from 33 per cent of agricultural land – showing that farms could be more productive.

The strategy is also expected to contain plans to solve the migrant worker shortage, including by giving new seasonal worker visas to poultry workers on British turkey farms and replacing fruit pickers from eastern Europe with robots.

Even though Britain’s climate would previously have prevented the growing of many crops, farmers now use “a new generation of sustainable and efficient greenhouses” which “provides opportunities to reduce our reliance on overseas production”, the strategy is to say.

The UK imports more than half of the mushrooms it eats, compared with one-fifth in 1990, and 70 per cent of its raspberries – up from 0.3 per cent.

Britain has seen little direct impact on its food supply since Russia’s invasion, since it is a major grower of wheat, Ukraine’s major food export.

But the rising costs of fuel and fertiliser on global markets has made food production more expensive, pushing higher prices on to customers.

Last month, a study by consumer champion Which? found that the prices of nearly 300 groceries had risen by more than a fifth over the past two years.

Monday’s strategy will announce a “focus on pioneering more organic-based fertilisers” that are less reliant on global supply chains.

But the strategy will not announce any immediate support for households, focusing instead on “longer-term measures to support a resilient, healthier and more sustainable food system”.

Government sources pointed to the £15 billion support package announced last month by the Chancellor, which was largely focused on energy bills, as evidence of what the Government has done to help alleviate the immediate cost of living crisis.

Plans to require schools, hospitals and prisons to buy more locally sourced food are also under consideration, while pubs and restaurants may be forced to declare any meat that comes from factory farms on their menus.

On Friday, Number 10 sources said the measures were part of a series of announcements on the cost of living in the coming weeks, including the delayed “growth plan”, now set to be revealed early next month.

“Everything we do now is forced to go through the lens of what it does for economic growth and easing the burden on British families,” a source said. “It’s going to be in everything we do.”