



## **Cider: The new politics of food**

### **Geoff andrews:**

Welcome to the Open University Open Politics Podcast on the New Politics of Food. I'm Geoff Andrews and I'm joined by Sue Braithwaite of Slow Food UK, and Kath Dalmeny, Policy Director for Sustain. The decline of the apple industry in Britain, certainly the decline of the orchards, is a simple story which has worried a lot of people. What I wanted to start by asking is how do simple stories like this have wider significance for understanding of food, politics and the way we live? Kath?

### **Kath Dalmeny:**

There was a period during the 1990s when every single campaign group or political organisation who wanted to talk about good food would put a picture of a child on the front holding an apple. It became the kind of symbol of everything that was good about food and everything we should be striving for. And yet, systematically we have lost many of the orchards that have been providing that fruit for hundreds of years.

### **Geoff Andrews:**

We've got the decline of orchards on the one hand, and then we see often we see images of people getting drunk, so called binge drinking, cos they're drinking cheap cider, and it seemed to be quite interesting mix.

### **Kath Dalmeny:**

I think when you describe the image of binge drinking in the UK, we can look to the root of that for the economics of alcohol. And it's the stack 'em high, sell it cheap mentality that has happened with the whole of the food system including alcohol and including cider.

So one of the proposals in the new government is to stop below cost selling of alcohol, which I think can only be welcomed. What we should also be looking at, stop below cost selling of milk; stop below cost selling of apples. We've squeezed the farming industry and artisan producers so hard that they can't produce good quality food so easily any more.

### **Geoff Andrews:**

Sue, you're the Coordinator of Slow Foods Ark of Taste, can you just describe what that organisation does?

### **Sue Braithwaite:**

The Ark of Taste starts as a catalogue of endangered fruits, vegetables, species, as a way of bringing attention to them and hoping to, bring a resurgence in the consumption of them. But also it is designed to drive economic change in the communities who produce those particular foods or food varieties.

### **Geoff Andrews:**

So is Britain in danger of losing its food heritage, would you say?

### **Sue Braithwaite:**

I think it is endanger of losing it in certain areas, but there is also a strong revival and people really wanting to connect back with not just the particular food varieties, but what that, that means for them, the history, stories around that as well.

### **Geoff andrews:**

And if we talk about many political issues from the environment, to health, to diet, you know, food is, is on the agenda. It also seems that there are new political movements around food that are emerging, that don't perhaps fit easily within Left and Right constraints and boundaries, and indeed, new political subjects.

So there seem to be new political movements around food, would you say?

**Sue Braithwaite:**

The underlying move around food and the change which people want to see in the food system is, is certainly there, and it's not something that is aligned with any particular political party, and therefore it does have the hope of being a much more sustainable movement and something which actually is becoming ingrained in the way people think about lots of different aspects of their lives.

**Geoff Andrews:**

One of the interesting things about the new debate around food is that rural food communities and urban food communities now seem to have something in common.

**Kath Dalmeny:**

Absolutely. I work part time with a box scheme, a vegetable box distribution scheme up in Hackney, and it was set up about 15 years ago by an amazing lady called Julie Brown who wanted to make connections between an urban community in a very, fairly poor area of London where I live, and farming communities, but also with people growing their own food to put into the box scheme. That's now and I'm very proud to say, although I can't take credit for it, feeding 3,000 people a week.

I see urban populations a lot in East London who are, have no shops because the larger supermarkets have moved in to posher areas in wealthier parts of towns, effectively sucking out the life blood of those communities, leaving behind people with no shops and no shopping. But I also see rural communities who are suffering from fuel prices going up.

In Norfolk, for example, where the fuel prices are such that it is no longer cost effective to deliver bread around the local area, so the shops do not contain bread.

Those issues face everybody, everywhere, these aren't just about rural and urban divides because we are reliant on each other. Quite often the urban area will provide the market, which makes farming sustainable, and of course, the urban area utterly relies on the farmers to survive at all.

**Geoff Andrews:**

So the new interest of food brings in many interesting connections, the local and the global; the rural and the urban, and also I think politics and pleasure. This is also an interesting development in politics. We don't often link politics and pleasure, do we, Sue?

**Sue Braithwaite:**

I think the sense of pleasure is absolutely at the heart of where Slow Food comes from. Because as we're seeing, when people actually understand that to grow a few things very locally, to take a little bit of effort about the way they choose those products, they will actually taste different and therefore they will want to get much more engaged in a food system. And we see that with young children, how important it is for them to get that variety of taste and flavour and understanding at a very very early age.

So I think pleasure drives a lot of the different activities that can really make change in the food system.

**Geoff Andrews:**

Kath?

**Kath Dalmeny:**

If you look at the two reasons we eat, one of them is to sustain ourselves, to give ourselves the components that allow us to live, and the other one is pleasure, absolutely. What I feel strange about with the word 'pleasure' is that we've allowed pleasure to be stolen from us by the purveyors of junk food.

A two litre bottle of a cola cost only 2 pence for the ingredients, leaving you with a lot of spare money once you've sold that in order to give the impression that this is something to do with good culture and pleasure when actually it's just sugar water in a bottle.

**Geoff Andrews:**

That's another aspect it seems of the new politics of food which is seeing the food movements helping to democratise food. Because often debates around food, as you say, are represented as being elitist.

**Kath Dalmeny:**

Unfortunately we've allowed somehow food quality to slip down the line of class where if you want good food, you have to buy into it and it has to be something posh and in a special box in the supermarket, in a different type of packaging, rather than saying: good food is the right of everybody.

**Geoff Andrews:**

Kath, thanks very much. Sue, thanks.

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