# Government retreats on promoting minimally processed foods after food industry lobbying



In recent months, significant controversy has emerged surrounding the influence of the food manufacturing sector on UK government policies aimed at promoting healthier diets. This issue has garnered attention following revelations from the Soil Association, which claimed that internal communications, obtained through Freedom of Information requests, illustrate a governmental retreat from plans to support “minimally processed and nutritious foods.” These foods, crucial for a healthy diet, include fruits, vegetables, wholegrains, and unprocessed meats.

Initial guidance from the Department of Health and Social Care sought to encourage food retailers to prioritise price promotions on these healthier foods. However, according to the Soil Association, the Food and Drink Federation (FDF)—representing major companies like Coca-Cola, Nestlé, and Unilever—successfully lobbied for these recommendations to be removed. The FDF labelled the government’s push for minimally processed foods as a "real bone of contention," suggesting that it conflicted with the interests of its members.

Cathy Cliff, campaigns coordinator for the Soil Association, critiqued this lobbying effort as predominantly benefiting the profits of ultra-processed food manufacturers rather than the health of consumers. She emphasised the World Health Organization’s stance that healthy diets primarily consist of unprocessed and minimally processed products. Cliff's concerns are echoed in an open letter, co-signed by the Obesity Health Alliance and other health organisations, which urges Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Wes Streeting, to take decisive action to make healthy foods more accessible.

The sector's pushback comes at a time when new government regulations are set to limit volume price promotions on foods high in fat, sugar, and salt (HFSS), effective from October. Initial guidance under these regulations hinted at a shift towards promoting fresh, minimally processed foods to combat the rising prevalence of ultra-processed diets. Unfortunately, following industry lobbying, the guidance was altered to recommend “healthier options,” which many have flagged as flawed. Notably, this new definition includes numerous ultra-processed items, such as energy drinks and snacks, undermining the initial intent of the regulation.

Critics, including Katharine Jenner, director of the Obesity Health Alliance, argue that the current approach reflects a longstanding issue in the food policy arena: a reliance on the industry that profits from unhealthy products to shape regulations intended to protect public health. In light of this, Jenner remarked on the critical need for transparency and stronger government action to counteract this pervasive industry influence.

The adverse impact of ultra-processed foods is not just a concern for public health advocates but for policymakers as well. Reports from the House of Lords have warned that excessive fears of state intervention have resulted in a failure to adequately address the growing obesity crisis—characterised as a public health emergency. Despite the introduction of numerous health policies over the years, the findings highlight that lobbying efforts have shifted the focus towards individual behaviour change, often sidelining broader, statutory measures that could promote systemic change.

Moreover, independent analyses have indicated that the direct involvement of major food businesses in regulatory discussions risks skewing the policy landscape in favour of corporate interests at the expense of public health goals. There are widespread calls for increased transparency within these lobbying processes, with advocates suggesting that substantial reforms are needed to ensure food policies effectively prioritise public health.

As the government navigates its regulatory framework, the ongoing challenge is to strike a balance between the interests of the food industry and the health needs of its population. The complexities of this issue underscore the importance of collaborative efforts among stakeholders—including health advocates, industry representatives, and policymakers—to create a food environment that genuinely supports the wellbeing of all citizens.

### Reference Map

1. All paragraphs are informed by the lead article.
2. Background on industry lobbying’s influence on government policy is drawn from article (2).
3. Calls for essential research and clarity in dietary guidelines are aligned with information from article (3).
4. Insights about the inadequacies in government intervention concerning obesity are drawn from article (4).
5. Discussion on industry influence within policymaking processes comes from article (5).
6. Critiques of the government’s handling of ultra-processed food regulation sourced from article (6).
7. Transparency and accountability in food industry lobbying referenced from article (7).

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.talkingretail.com/news/industry-news/manufacturers-accused-of-blocking-shop-discounts-on-healthy-foods-19-05-2025/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/0b9ad138-1867-439f-96a5-7986d5aa66ae> - This article discusses the influence of the food industry on government policies regarding ultra-processed foods (UPFs). It highlights how companies like Nestlé, PepsiCo, and Mars have lobbied against regulations by questioning scientific research linking UPFs to health issues. The piece also notes that only a few countries have incorporated UPFs into dietary guidelines, and it emphasizes the need for nuanced policies to promote healthier diets without stigmatizing socioeconomic groups reliant on packaged foods.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/f3bcc428-b92e-48a5-b913-0d8a20782740> - This letter responds to an editorial on the risks of ultra-processed foods, emphasizing the need for further research to establish causality between UPFs and health issues. It advocates for controlled trials to determine harmful processes or ingredients and suggests that the food industry is prepared to act swiftly if new risks are identified. The letter also calls for improved clarity in nutritional information and government dietary guidance, highlighting the importance of collaboration among stakeholders to enhance public adherence to healthy eating practices.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/e2168d2b-2282-4eac-84c2-6f9187456b21> - This article reports on a House of Lords committee's warning that excessive state intervention fears have led to inadequate action on unhealthy diets and food company regulation, resulting in an obesity 'public health emergency.' The committee urges the government to develop a long-term plan to address the 'broken' food system and ensure the industry bears the costs. Despite numerous policies since 1992, obesity levels in England continue to rise, partly due to conflicts of interest between ministers and the industry during policy development.
5. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld5901/ldselect/ldmfdo/19/1907.htm> - This House of Lords report examines the influence of the food and drink industry on policymaking processes. It discusses how industry lobbying has led to a focus on individual behavior change through education, while opposing whole-population-based statutory measures. The report highlights tactics such as positioning companies as partners in voluntary measures and argues that industry influence has been significant in shaping policies that align with business interests rather than public health goals.
6. <https://www.foodmanufacture.co.uk/Article/2023/07/12/UK-government-criticised-for-unhealthy-food-approach/> - This article reports on criticism of the UK government's approach to unhealthy, ultra-processed foods. Investors and industry bodies have called for more transparency on unhealthy food sales, questioning the government's U-turn on a mandatory reporting policy. The Soil Association also criticized a government review into the health impacts of ultra-processed foods, expressing concerns that industry ties may have influenced the committee's conclusions, potentially skewing the review's findings.
7. <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/press-release/report-uncovers-opaque-nature-food-industry-ministerial-lobby> - This press release from the Food Foundation discusses a report revealing the opaque nature of food industry lobbying with government ministers. The report highlights that large food businesses and their trade associations often have significant access to ministers, raising concerns about the influence of industry interests on public health policymaking. The Food Foundation calls for improved transparency and frameworks to scrutinize lobbying activities to ensure policies prioritize public health over corporate interests.