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| Institution: University of Sheffield |
| Unit of Assessment: 17B - Geography, Environmental Studies and Archaeology: Geography |
| Title of case study: Understanding the impact of recent changes in UK food and farming |
| <p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Research by Jackson and the CONANX group (Consumer anxieties about food) at Sheffield has enhanced understanding of recent changes in UK food and farming, including the globalization of supply chains, technological innovation and retail concentration all of which have led to increased consumer anxieties about food safety and security. The research has influenced commercial practice for a leading UK food retailer; enhanced public understanding and encouraged more healthy eating (via museum exhibitions, an educational website and changes to school curricula); and helped shape public policy (through Jackson's work with DEFRA and the Food Standards Agency).</p> |
| <p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The impact is based on three recent research projects characterised by increasing theoretical ambition and international reach: an AHRC-ESRC <i>Cultures of Consumption</i> project on food commodity chains (focusing on the UK poultry and sugar industries); a Leverhulme Trust programme on changing food and family structure in the UK, Japan and Hungary (<i>Changing Families, Changing Food</i>); and a European Research Council Advanced Investigator award on <i>Consumer Culture in an 'Age of Anxiety'</i>.</p> <p>The <i>Cultures of Consumption</i> project (£150k, 2003-7) focused on recent changes in the chicken and sugar industries, showing how innovations in food production and manufacturing were accompanied by changes in food retailing and marketing. The project demonstrated the interweaving of political and moral economies [R1], using the idea of 'food stories' to convey its narrative-based (life history) approach, working closely with oral historians at the British Library and with our retail partners (including Marks & Spencer, British Sugar and Tate & Lyle) [R2].</p> <p>The <i>Changing Families, Changing Food</i> (CFCF) programme (£1.2m, 2005-8), led by Jackson, involved an inter-disciplinary team of >40 social scientists and health researchers at Sheffield and Royal Holloway-University of London. Comprised of fifteen projects, the programme was organised into three research strands focusing on changes across the life-course. The key findings of the research [R3] challenged orthodox thinking about individual 'food choice' (emphasising the socially-embedded, routine character of most domestic food practices); questioned the historical evidence on which current assertions about the decline of the 'family meal' are based; and revealed significant gaps between lay knowledge and expert advice about 'healthy eating'.</p> <p>The CONANX project (<i>Consumer Culture in an 'Age of Anxiety'</i>, £1.3m, 2009-12) investigated consumer anxieties about food at a range of geographical scales, from global shifts in agricultural commodity markets to the household scale of family life and domestic practice. The project took a 'whole chain' approach, illustrating the occurrence of food anxieties at all stages along the supply chain 'from farm to fork'. The project also proposed a new theoretical approach, understanding anxiety as a social condition [R4].</p> <p>Taken together these projects have increased academic and public understanding of recent changes in UK food and farming, providing fresh insights into the impact of agricultural intensification and technological change on consumer anxieties about food. The research has developed new ways of thinking about food supply chains [R5] and demonstrated the effects of consumers' growing disconnection from sites of agricultural production. Our findings have had direct application in improving public understanding of the agri-food system with tangible benefits in</p> |

terms of food safety and public health (detailed in section 4).

Key researchers on these interdisciplinary projects at the University of Sheffield include Professor Peter Jackson as PI; sociologist Professor Allison James (co-I in the CFCF project); 18 co-investigators (including Dr Megan Blake, Professor Danny Dorling, Professor Charles Pattie and Dr Matthew Watson in the Department of Geography); 14 RAs and 2 PhD students. Other co-investigators and RAs were employed at Newcastle, Royal Holloway and Gothenburg (Sweden).

The CFCF project led to a Knowledge Exchange grant, funded by HEIF, to prepare oral history data for a museum exhibition. The practical application of the CONANX research is being taken forward via a Proof of Concept award (ERC, £148k, 2013) in collaboration with food businesses and NGOs in the UK and Sweden. The research has been published in leading international journals [R1, R2, R4, R5] and in books with respected academic publishers [R3, R6].

3. References to the research

- R1. JACKSON, P., Ward, N. and Russell, P. 2009. Moral economies of food and geographies of responsibility. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 34, 12-24 doi: [10.1111/j.1475-5661.2008.00330.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-5661.2008.00330.x)
- R2. JACKSON, P. 2010. Food stories: consumption in an age of anxiety. *Cultural Geographies* 17(2), 147-165 doi: [10.1177/1474474010363844](https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474010363844)
- R3. JACKSON, P. ed. 2009. *Changing Families, Changing Food*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- R4. JACKSON, P. and Everts, J. 2010. Anxiety as social practice. *Environment and Planning A* 42(11), 2791-2806 doi: [10.1068/a4385](https://doi.org/10.1068/a4385)
- R5. JACKSON, P., Russell, P. and Ward, N. 2006. Mobilising the commodity chain concept in the politics of food and farming. *Journal of Rural Studies* 22(2), 129-141 (doi: [10.1016/j.jrurstud.2005.08.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2005.08.008))
- R6. JACKSON, P, and the CONANX group 2013. *Food Words*. London: Bloomsbury.

4. Details of the impact

Knowledge exchange (KE) has been integral to the work of Jackson's research group, built in from the earliest project design phase and supported by core funding as well as through specific funding for KE. The research has impacted on public understanding, changing school curricula, influencing food manufacturers and retailers, and informing national food safety policy.

Enhancing public understanding: The public impact of Jackson's research is on-going and has included the *Food Glorious Food* exhibition (in Sheffield and London) and the *Food Stories* educational website (hosted by the British Library). Inspired by our *Changing Families, Changing Food* research, the *Food Glorious Food* exhibition was held at Weston Park Museum in Sheffield (March-November 2010), later transferring to the V&A Museum of Childhood in Bethnal Green. The exhibition included extracts from Jackson's oral history research, facilitated by a £9k grant from HEIF's Knowledge Transfer Opportunities Fund. At Weston Park, the exhibition received >150,000 visitors - the museum's most popular exhibition to date. At the Museum of Childhood, the exhibition received >125,000 visitors. In their formal evaluation [S1], Museums-Sheffield reported that over half of the visitors felt that it had given them a new understanding of food and 61% said that they intended to make lifestyle changes as a result of attending (cooking more often, eating more fruit and vegetables, thinking more carefully about what they eat). The report described the exhibition's success in strengthening Museums-Sheffield's relationship with the University, the NHS and the V&A, enhancing their reputation for delivering high quality, popular exhibitions.

The *Food Stories* website was developed in partnership with the British Library, drawing directly on Jackson's AHRC-ESRC research. It includes testimony from business leaders about the development of the 'cold chain' (which made fresh chicken widely available to UK consumers), reflections on the moral geographies of sugar production, and commentaries on food and multiculturalism. The research has also made an enduring contribution to the Library's collections (especially the National Life Stories' *Food: from source to salespoint* archive) where the life history interviews (including recordings, transcripts and summaries) are available for public use.

The group's work has received extensive media coverage in BBC News Online, *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Economist* and the *Yorkshire Post* and on radio and in the trade press. It was the subject of a double-page spread in the *Times Higher* and was included in the Academy of Social Sciences' *Health and Wellbeing* brochure (making the case for the social sciences).

Changing school curricula: The *Food Stories* website has been widely used in UK secondary schools as part of the KS3-4 National Curriculum in Geography and Citizenship. The website was promoted through presentations at the Geographical Association (GA) annual conference and through a paper in *Teaching Geography* (2008). A CD of 27 interview extracts was produced and distributed without charge at conferences and other public events (including ESRC's Festival of Social Science). The website attracts >10,000 unique visitors a year (30,000 since January 2011) and was nominated for an award by The Guild of Food Writers [S2]. Writing in the GA's flagship journal *Geography* (2010) a London school-teacher described the website's value in teaching about food and multiculturalism, motivating students to develop their understanding of cultural pluralism and social integration [S3]. Assessing its wider educational significance, the GA's former Chief Executive writes that Jackson's work has had '*significant impact ... on the way geography in schools is conceptualized*', also confirming that '*his clear articulation of the relational understanding that thinking geographically can bring is an acknowledged influence in the GA's proposals to government with respect to the current national curriculum review*' (letter dated 8 June 2012) [S4].

Influencing commercial strategies: The impact of the *Food Stories* research on commercial strategy has been endorsed by a leading UK retailer. Marks & Spencer's former Director of Technology confirms how '*The research programme ... brought home the challenges that were faced ... in the factory, in transport and in store display along with the "positive hygiene" required to clean up factory processes and reduce microbiological contamination [enabling] fresh prepared chicken to be sold chilled rather than frozen*'. He concludes that the project enabled M&S to '*relearn the lessons from the past and reapply them for the future ... revisiting innovation strategies and starting again with the challenge of what we want to achieve and how we apply science and technology to achieve this*' [S5]. This work is being taken forward in Jackson's current ERC-funded Proof of Concept work, providing customised advice to food manufacturers and retailers and to food-related NGOs in the UK and Sweden.

Informing national food safety policy: Jackson also contributes to the development of national food safety policy in his role as Chair of the Food Standards Agency's Social Science Research Committee [S6]. Specific contributions (reflecting his recent research on families and food) include a co-authored report on the rise of *Listeria monocytogenes* among the over 60s which led the FSA to commission new research on domestic food safety practices (on which Jackson was an advisor). Jackson also serves on ESRC's expert group on Energy, Environment and Food Security and was a member of the synthesis group for DEFRA's Green Food Project.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- S1. The Chief Executive of Museums-Sheffield can corroborate the impact of the *Food Glorious Food* exhibition, confirming visitor numbers and verifying the high level of public interest in the exhibition and accompanying lecture series.
- S2. The Head of the Social Science Division at the British Library can confirm the public impact of the *Food Stories* website and the value of Jackson's research in contributing to the Library's collections.
- S3. The impact of Jackson's *Food Stories* research on teaching about food and multiculturalism in London schools is corroborated in an article on 'Teaching about multicultural food to multicultural students in a multicultural school', published in *Geography* (Summer 2010), 95: 80-87.
- S4. Statement from the former Chief Executive of The Geographical Association confirms the educational impact of the *Food Stories* research in British schools.
- S5. Statement from the former director of technology at Marks & Spencer confirms the significance of the *Food Stories* research for food manufacturers and retailers.
- S6. Jackson's role as Chair of the Food Standards Agency's Social Science Research Committee can be verified by consulting the SSRC website: <http://ssrc.food.gov.uk/aboutus/membersofssrc> (last accessed 31 July 2013). Evidence of his specific contributions can be confirmed by reading the SSRC's annual reports (<http://ssrc.food.gov.uk/annualreports/>, last accessed 31 July 2013) Jackson also serves as an ex officio member of the FSA's General Advisory Committee on Science (<http://gacs.food.gov.uk/moregacs/gacsmembers>, last accessed 31 July 2013).