MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

New Zealand has no Minister responsible for food security in an increasingly fragile global economy – incoming Government urged to act

In a week that it was revealed that our biggest food producer is seeking to dump millions of litres of milk, and a national survey shows one in three households in New Zealand experiences food insecurity, a group of researchers have released a briefing urging the incoming government to treat national food security as a priority.

New Zealand has no Minister or government agency accountable for national food security, despite growing threats to the systems that put food on our tables. A new briefing to the incoming Government is calling for urgent action to address this gap, warning that our apparent abundance of food could prove dangerously fragile in the face of global disruption.

"Food is an absolute necessity for human survival, but New Zealand has no Minister accountable for national food security. This is a problem in an increasingly uncertain world: in the face of predicted impacts from the super El Niño on global food supplies, current geopolitical conflict disrupting supply chains and the long-term impacts of climate change" says lead author Dr Matt Boyd, Islands for the Future of Humanity.

The briefing, *National Food Security: A Briefing to the Incoming Government*, challenges the widespread assumption that New Zealand is food secure simply because it exports large quantities of agricultural products.

In reality, much of our food production depends on imported diesel, fertiliser, agrichemicals, seeds and machinery. We also rely heavily on overseas suppliers for everyday staples such as wheat, rice, plant proteins such as legumes, sugar and edible oils. Disruption to international trade, geopolitical conflict, energy shortages or extreme weather could therefore have serious consequences for both domestic food production and the availability of food in supermarkets.

"Being highly productive is not the same as being food secure when our food systems depend so critically on a stable climate and a suite of imported goods and services from distant lands," says Boyd.

The vulnerabilities are not just a future concern. Food insecurity is already an everyday reality for many New Zealanders. The recently released Hunger Monitor Survey revealed that almost one in three households experienced moderate or severe food insecurity over the past year. Meanwhile, food price inflation continues to outstrip general inflation, placing disproportionate pressure on lower-income households.

The briefing calls on the incoming government to establish a Ministerial portfolio for food security, commission a National Food Vulnerability Assessment and develop a National Food Security Strategy. It also recommends strengthening the protection of productive soils, boosting domestic production of essential staples, safeguarding critical food infrastructure and supporting household and community resilience in terms of food supply and production. As the Fonterra case shows, there is also an urgent need for stronger regulation when it comes to food wastage, especially at the production level.

The briefing is part of The Reality of Everything Initiative, a collaboration of public policy experts, academics and researchers working to raise awareness among citizens and politicians about the interconnected environmental, economic, social and geopolitical crises described as the polycrisis – and, most crucially, how society can respond.

Food security illustrates why these challenges cannot be considered in isolation. Climate change, biodiversity loss, energy insecurity, resource depletion and geopolitical instability all have direct implications for what food we can produce, how reliably it reaches us and what it costs.

"New Zealand has the potential to be a place of refuge for its people in times of global disruption. But that advantage is not guaranteed. It depends on decisions we make now," says Dr Catherine Knight, convenor of the Reality of Everything Initiative. “This briefing urges the government to seriously engage with this issue and start confronting those decisions.”

Download and read the Briefing on National Food Security
https://realityofeverything.org/briefing-national-food-security.pdf

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