

# MINISTRY OF FOOD

## JAMIE'S MANIFESTO

This manifesto explains a really effective way to empower the public to make short and long term changes. I believe it will radically improve the health prospects and social welfare of the British public, regardless of age and class.

In simple terms, the things this country needs are:

- Cooking skills to be taught to primary children at school
- Cooking skills to be taught to adults
- Food centres to open all over the country with professionally trained cookery teachers to support both
- Incentives for employers to teach cooking skills at work

I'm asking the government to help make this happen. This is why.

When I set out to re-establish the Ministry of Food, I wanted to dig into some issues which have been nagging at me since School Dinners. I wanted to find out more about how people eat at home and why our diet is helping to turn us into one of the most obese countries in the world.

I also wanted to see if I could find a way to tackle the problem by getting people cooking again, to give them the tools to help themselves by learning some basic food skills, to feel confident in the kitchen and enjoy eating their own meals.

Diet and health are massive social issues. Obesity already costs the NHS more than smoking: £4.2 billion vs £2.7 billion. Over 9,000 people already die prematurely each year due to health conditions caused by being overweight; cancer, heart disease, stroke and diabetes are the most common. This will be the first generation in which children are predicted to die before their parents.

One of the insights from the government's recent research into obesity is that "lack of knowledge, confidence and skills is the main barrier which stops parents cooking from scratch". But the new obesity strategy contains nothing specific to address the problem, ie teaching people to cook.

Cooking skills used to be passed down through the generations but now that chain has been broken. With more women out at work and

no compulsory cooking lessons at school, two generations have not been taught the basics.

In making the Ministry series, we set out to help people tackle the obvious problems of lack of money and time. But we found we had to start with the more fundamental issues of a lack of cooking ability and lack of food knowledge.

In Rotherham, we set up Pass It On to keep cooking skills alive. We found that, armed with a little bit of knowledge and confidence, people very quickly started to change the way they were eating.

On my Ministry of Food website, we have provided what I think are some of the basic recipes, videos and kitchen advice to help get people on the first rung of the ladder and Passing It On. The idea is to mobilise anyone who can cook to teach their friends, family, and work-mates how to make a few simple, affordable meals from scratch.

If a better diet is one of the keys to sorting out our health and obesity problems, then the government urgently needs to be putting cooking right at the top of its agenda.

The wartime Ministry of Food was a great model. It bombarded the population with help and advice, to make sure people knew how to feed themselves properly. We need to get loads of professional cookery teachers trained up to do the same again, to work right through the community. They need to reach the people who don't cook, don't watch cookery programmes, don't buy cook books, don't know about food. If they give it a try and start to feel inspired about cooking, the government could make a massive difference, and quickly. All it needs is proper funding and support from central government, specifically the departments of health, skills and education.

The money should be used to:

1. SET UP A FOOD CENTRE IN EVERY TOWN

The Ministry Food centre in Rotherham is unique. Nowhere else has walk-in facilities, of such a high standard, offering a basic cooking course to the local community.

The centre is a hub for Pass It On where local people can meet professional cookery teachers face-to-face, get hands on experience with food and take a course in basic cooking. It is also training up healthcare and social workers to operate satellites in children's centres, schools and other parts of the

community.

We've put together a set of ten simple meals which cover the basic food skills: chopping, frying, roasting and baking. After a course of ten lessons, most people will know how to follow a recipe and be able to transfer what they've learned to other dishes and ingredients.

We reckon a good centre could be running over 5,400 sessions a year.

I'm prepared to set up a team of professionals to help provide training and mentoring, along with a package of inspiring recipes that are relevant and affordable, for any other council leader who wants to set up a food centre in their town.

We need a central pot of government funding to help local councils set up food centres all over the country.

## 2. MAKE SURE THEY'RE STAFFED BY HOME EC TEACHERS

These girls know how to teach people about home cooking and they're a dying breed. Their profession got wartime Britain's health back on track. We need them again now, to show us the basic food skills like how to shop for ingredients, how to use equipment, how to make the most of local and seasonal food, and how to make good simple meals on a tight budget.

## 3. PUT COOKS OUT IN THE COMMUNITY

We also need more home economists being trained up, to make sure there are enough properly-qualified people to work in the community.

Follow the original Ministry of Food and set up a national demonstration team. Send out people to run group Pass It On events in universities, offices, factories, shopping centres, village halls, football clubs, schools and colleges: anywhere you can gather a crowd, especially places with under-used cooking facilities. All they need is a set of cooking equipment, some mobile gas burners, ingredients and wheels to get there. It could be a one-off event for people who have never cooked anything before to get them started. Or, with a set of the recipes and promotional material, each host organisation can follow up with their own cooking programme to keep Pass It On moving.

One of my students, Mick "the miner" has already managed to get 33 universities signed up to hold pass it on events; they love the idea because it will help to get their students thinking about eating properly.

Funding would be needed to administer and run the programme, and train up and pay home economists and cooks, mostly professionals but also some enthusiastic amateurs, to work out in the field. This team could be linked in to food centres as they become established.

#### 4. SUPPORT BUSINESSES TO PASS IT ON

We are being contacted by businesses all over the country who want to set up Pass It On for their workforce and their families. They see it as a great way to promote employee health, team building and community relations; and to break down the barriers separating departments in big businesses.

Offering tax incentives to businesses who are prepared to invest in their staff health through cookery would encourage many more to take part and could make a significant contribution to the workplace objectives in the obesity strategy.

#### 5. INVEST IN MOBILE FOOD CENTRES FOR DEPRIVED NEIGHBOURHOODS

Focus on Food run a small fleet of cooking buses which go to schools and introduce cooking to kids, parents and teachers all over the country. They inspire people to keep cooking long after their visit and are a fantastic marketing tool for cooking. Wales has one, Scotland now has one and both include community lessons in their programmes.

Ten more buses would act as mobile food centres, operating in deprived and inner city neighbourhoods and extreme locations, to encourage people on low incomes with limited access to local facilities to start cooking.

Operating flat out, a bus could run over 11,500 sessions a year.

#### 6. PROMOTE CHEAP FOOD

Set up a consortium of all the supermarkets to fund a rolling programme to promote fresh ingredients for cheap meals. Recipes with money-off coupons for things like potatoes, onions, salad, mince and other basic ingredients would help promote

sales of non-processed food. This could be linked in to the Healthy Start voucher scheme for young mums.

## 7. FUND ADULT COOKERY CLASSES

In my last manifesto four years ago I asked for education for parents. It's too late for today's young adults and parents, whose children are the focus of the obesity strategy, to benefit from changes to the secondary curriculum.

It's very difficult to find a basic cookery course for adults. You can learn hospitality or catering, or join a cook and eat group, but there's nothing formal available which teaches people the skills needed to boil an egg and roast a chicken.

So, I'm starting to design a foundation cookery course which I'd like the government to fund. If cooking is recognised in the government's framework for adult learning as an essential life skill, then food centres, local colleges and schools will be able to access government funding.

People working in the community on health and obesity need this training too. Knowing how to make food fun and cooking appealing would help them get better results and may help them change their own food habits as well.

## 8. GET KIDS COOKING PROPERLY

Things have moved on since School Dinners. Licence to Cook is in schools this autumn, and cooking will be compulsory for 11 – 14 year olds from 2011. But I'm worried that the number of hours is not going to be enough and that the dishes our kids get taught won't inspire them. It's essential that what's being developed for the secondary curriculum is written by a team of qualified cookery teachers and writers who know what gets kids interested. Whilst the latest "Real Meals" cookbook is a step in the right direction it doesn't inspire.

The primary curriculum urgently needs to be changed. Many kids won't be getting more than four hands-on cooking sessions before they go to secondary school. Many primaries are also desperately short of proper facilities.

Government already acknowledges that many kids who cook at school change the way the family eats at home. Families with babies and primary-age children are the main target for the obesity strategy. So it makes sense to put proper cooking

lessons on the primary curriculum, to ensure kids are learning about food and how to cook as early as possible. The bare minimum for primary teaching should be one dish per term.

Teacher training urgently needs to include cooking. Many young teachers are unlikely to know how to cook themselves, so without professional training won't be able to give even simple lessons in the subject. At secondary level, it's essential that cookery is going to be taught by a properly-qualified teacher, and that applies to existing schools, as well as those where new lessons are going to be introduced.

We also need the government to fund research into how much cooking is actually going on in primary schools, to what standard, with what facilities and where community programmes teach young parents too. And an assessment of how much is going to be needed to upgrade facilities so proper cooking lessons can take place.

Money is needed to cover the cost of ingredients for all children. If every supermarket was encouraged to adopt their local secondary school they could provide ingredients at very little extra cost per store and court customers for the future.

## SUPPORT FOR THE MINISTRY OF FOOD

We're asking the government to provide funding to support the Ministry of Food's plans.

- **FOOD CENTRES**

We estimate a food centre costs £150,000 to set up. (By comparison, government is providing £300,000 for new cookery areas in schools.)

Setting up 150 more would cost £22.5 million, which central government should fund. Running costs could come from local government and health budgets as they do in Rotherham.

- **FOOD BUSES**

10 food buses @ £2 million each for three years would cost £20 million.

- **ADULT COOKING CLASSES**

Entitlement to adult training budgets to fund cookery classes, especially for people on income support and in deprived areas. Investing in food skills now will save millions for the National Health

Service later.

- **TRAINING AND JOBS FOR COOKERY TEACHERS**  
More properly qualified teachers working in schools and the community will deliver rapid change. During WWII, the government funded a one-year crash course to train a new army of home economists and then employed them in the field. We need a similar programme now.
- **FREE INGREDIENTS FOR SCHOOL COOKING CLASSES**  
The cost of ingredients will be covered for children on free school meals; this funding should be available to all children who learn to cook at school.
- **TAX INCENTIVES FOR BUSINESSES**  
Help employers promote better diets through cooking by offering tax incentives.

## GOVERNMENT OBESITY PLANS

Here are the key facts about the government's obesity plans:

- £372 million of additional funds to 2011; it is unclear how this budget will be spent. (This has to cover the whole country; by comparison, school meals got £237 million for the first three years.)
- Including £75 million for Change4Life, a marketing and communications campaign with TV advertising, website, leaflets etc.
- £65 million to be shared by local health services to fund local obesity plans, with specific focus on people who are already clinically obese: 25% of adults, 10% of 5 year olds and 17.5% of 10 year olds.
- No additional funding has been provided for local authorities, unless they are in a deprived area, to help them work with the rest of the population.
- Targets a halt in the rise in childhood obesity by 2020. Primary children are weighed at five and ten years old as a key indicator of change.
- National Obesity Forum experts advise that the problem is escalating quickly, that in just over ten year's time 75% of people will be overweight or obese; 60% of adults and 20% of children

already are.

Government is working on predictions 40 years away, to 2050.

- Contains no plans to improve food skills in the home. But evidence shows that cooking lessons give people confidence and lead to dietary change.

#### A FOOTNOTE ON SCHOOL DINNERS

- To date, government has committed over £650 million to changing school meals.
- This includes £150 million to build new kitchens, but nothing is available to renovate existing ones, too many of which have to operate with equipment 30 – 50 years old.
- 3 million kids eat a school meal daily: 43% of primary students (up by 2%) and 37% at secondary (down by 0.5%).
- Following the School Dinners campaign, school meals and their uptake have been included as one of the government's key indicators in the national obesity strategy.

Jamie Oliver  
Ministry of Food  
17 October 2008