

Food system 'close to collapse,' Polanski warns as figures show costs to rise 170% by 2050

In a speech to the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union today, Green Party leader Zack Polanski will warn that food insecurity is not a 'distant threat' and is already impacting customers, farmers and workers in the food industry. Warning that the UK's food system is 'close to collapse' under pressure from rising temperatures and global instability, Polanski will call for urgent action to support the UK's food resilience.

The speech comes as figures from the Autonomy Institute show that UK fruit and veg prices could rise 170% by 2050, with the climate crisis set to become the leading driver of fresh produce inflation in the UK.

Speaking at the union's keynote address, Polanski will accuse the government of 'just not getting it' when it comes to the crisis facing the UK's food system and call for government to produce a real plan to boost British food production and support customers struggling to afford food.

Last week, Green MP Adrian Ramsay challenged Ministers in Parliament over two suppressed Government-commissioned reports warning of serious risks to the UK's national security, including ecosystem collapse, biodiversity loss, food security and water supplies.

He will call for:

- Support for farmers to adapt their practises to a changing climate to make UK food growing more resilient
- Stronger regulation of supermarkets to ensure farmers get a fair deal for their produce
- Free school meals for all primary and secondary pupils to support families struggling to put food on the table
- A £15/hour minimum wage for all workers to tackle the cost of living crisis.

Polanski will say:

"Just a couple of weeks ago, we saw the hottest May day ever recorded in the UK. By the beginning of May, the UK had received received 23% less rain than average. The Climate Change Committee warns that within 25 years we could see temperatures above 40°C.

"That doesn't just mean more people getting sick from extreme heat, or more pressure on infrastructure that just isn't built for these temperatures. As many of you in this room well know, it has terrifying implications for the most fundamental need we all have – food.

"And right now, from food growers to customers – and everyone in between –

the crisis is already making itself felt.

“That’s something you all know well – and it’s time we started listening to you.

“Because whether you get up at the crack of dawn to serve pasties to hungry commuters, spend hours rising dough, or work in rain or shine picking fruit – your work is what keeps this country moving.

“But all too often, that fact is forgotten. Your work is sneered at, shrugged off, or taken for granted.

“Your pay doesn’t match the importance of the work you do – and doesn’t keep up with your rising bills. Your hours get longer, you’re expected to work in increasingly hot or wet conditions, you’re on a precarious contract so you’re scared to take sick leave or have a day off to spend with your kids.

“And all the while, when you go to the supermarket to put food on the table, the prices there are rising too – while the farmers that produced it aren’t being paid fairly either.

“The system is broken. And under increasing strain from the climate crisis, it’s close to collapse.”

Dr. Will Stronge, CEO at the Autonomy Institute, said:

“We have been cautious in our assumptions – looking only at heatwaves, and only against a stable inflation backdrop. The conclusion is still stark: within fifteen years, climate change will be the biggest single factor driving up the cost of fresh food.

“Politicians cannot afford to wait and see. The time to build food resilience into our industrial strategy is now, before the pressures become acute.”

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