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By Michael Barker

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## ***Fruit and veg 'should be focus of Covid-19 fight'***



Leading academics call for government to place less emphasis on big retailers and more on fruit and veg availability

**T**he government is being urged to launch an urgent mass public messaging campaign promoting how healthy eating can boost the body's immune system against the threat of Covid-19.

Professors Tim Lang of City, University of London, Erik Millstone of the University of Sussex Business School and Terry Marsden of Cardiff University have this week written to Defra secretary George Eustice and Duncan Selbie of Public Health England urging that similar importance be given to healthy eating advice as there has been dedicated to social distancing.

The experts warn that the government has ceded too much decision-making on food controls on the supplies and prices of food items to the leading food retailers. Instead, they argue the government should take responsibility for ensuring that foods of highest nutritional and immunological value are available to all, and in particular to the

most vulnerable.

The trio have previously warned that the government should make preparations for rationing fresh fruit and vegetable supplies in the UK, as those foods may become scarce, given of the devastating impact of Covid-19 in the UK's main suppliers, namely Italy and Spain.

Writing to Eustice and Duncan Selbie, who is chief executive of Public Health England, the academics have called for clear health and nutritional advice to the public and the food industry about food consumption; a new advisory system to be set up within Whitehall to coordinate public policies and messaging, to give clear advice on how food supplies should improve immune responses to Covid-19; new local food liaison committees to be created to draw upon civil society initiatives and local knowledge; and more systematic attention to economically and medically 'at risk' groups who need help having access to sufficient, healthy and affordable food.

Marsden, professor and director of the Sustainable Places Research Centre at Cardiff University, said: "There is a real danger that local supply chains are being swept aside by government's emphasis on the big retailers."

Millstone, emeritus professor of science policy at the Science Policy Research Unit at the University of Sussex Business School, said: "People need to be well-nourished to strengthen their immune systems to resist Covid-19 infections, or to recover rapidly if they fall ill. So the government urgently needs to develop and implement policies to ensure that everyone has enough of the right kinds of food to combat this pandemic."

Tim Lang, professor of food policy at the Centre for Food Policy, City, University of London, said: "As this crisis unfolds, we need a strong voice for consumers at the heart of Whitehall, and for it to be seen to act for the public interest."

<http://www.fruitnet.com/americafruit/article/1474/parts-of-san-diego-quarantined-as-psyllid-count-mounts>

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