

Should our food be cheaper?

University of Reading and Reading Town Meal organisers have joined forces to stage a great debate about the costs of food we eat and who pays the price. The 'Question Time' style debate "*Should our food be cheaper?*" takes place in the historic Great Hall on Wednesday 2 October, where the public are invited to put questions to an expert panel about the fairness of food prices to the consumer and to the people who produce it.

The debate is linked to the Reading Town Meal at the end of the week when Reading residents are invited to a free community banquet at Forbury Gardens. More than 1,000 diners are expected on Saturday 5 October, who can also take part in the food festival including fun family activities, competitions, live music, and stalls. All are welcome to both events, which are free.

Paul Harper, from the Town Meal Steering Group, said "Reading's Town Meal is a brilliant fun event for all the family that celebrates food grown in and around Reading by home-growers and local farmers. But, there are also serious issues and tensions around the production and price of the food we eat, so we are really pleased to partner with the University of Reading to bring together experts from the world of politics and campaigning, supermarket suppliers and food producers to debate these issues with the people of Reading".

This year's Town Meal Debate panel includes:

- ◆ Quentin Clark, Head of Sustainability and Ethical Sourcing at Waitrose,
- ◆ Organic farmer Richard Gantlett of Yatesbury House Farm in Wiltshire
- ◆ Graciela Romero, International Programmes Director with the UK campaign group, War on Want
- ◆ Dr Carol Wagstaff, Associate Professor of Crop Quality for Health at Centre for Food Security, University of Reading.

Dr Alison Bailey from the School of Agriculture, Policy and Development at the University said: "We are delighted to host the Reading Town Meal debate. We hope to raise key issues that already form a big part of our research into agriculture and the economics of food systems, both in the UK and globally. Increasingly we have got used to relatively cheap food in this country, but at what cost? Cheap food on our plates can mean low prices for our farmers or pitiful wages for workers overseas. Current systems of production are not sustainable, both for farmers and the wider community, how can we fix that? It is understandable that some people on low-incomes feel they can't afford to eat well – especially in the current economic climate."

The Town Meal Debate will take place at 7.00pm, Wednesday 2 October at the University of Reading's Great Hall, London Road Campus. Places are free but limited - you can reserve a place now by visiting www.reading.ac.uk/events

To find out more about both the Town Meal and the Town Meal Debate visit www.readingtowntownmeal.org.uk

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