

JLGC Seminar Report

Date and time: Tuesday February 15 2022, 10:00-12:00

Theme: Local Food Strategies in Japan and the UK: Healthy Nutrition for All

Format: Webinar

Participants: 125 people registered, 71 in attendance

Summary: Although Japan has one of the longest life expectancies in the world, prevention of life-style related diseases and extending a healthy life expectancy is becoming a major social problem. Because of this, national and local government are making various efforts based on the Basic Law on Dietary Education and the Basic Plan for the Promotion of Dietary Education, such as teaching healthy eating through school lunches and encouraging reduced salt diets to adults.

In the UK, national and local government have various initiatives to address unhealthy eating and provide low-cost food. Recently, healthy food has been attracting a lot of interest, and more emphasis is being placed on improving people's nutrition and knowledge about health to create a healthier and sustainable social infrastructure. The government is working towards the planned publication of the Food Strategy White Paper, its first food policy themed white paper.

In both countries new food and healthy eating related initiatives are being promoted. The theme of this year's JLGC Seminar was 'Local Food Strategies in Japan and the UK'. The aim was to share both countries' various experiences and opinions to create more effective policy in both countries.

The seminar was held in two parts. In session one, Professor Yukari Takemi from Kagawa Nutrition University gave an outline of policies related to nutritional education and food in Japan. For session two, local government officials from Sanjo City in Niigata Prefecture and Obama City in Fukui presented their initiatives.

Furthermore, after various presentations a panel discussion and Q and A session with local government and NPOs working in public health was held, discussing school lunches and community cooking classes in the UK.

Session 1

1: Food and Nutrition Education and Policy in Japan

Yukari Takemi- Nutrition Ecology, Graduate School of Nutrition Sciences Kagawa Nutrition University

- Food Strategy Overview

In Japan, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare works on healthy meals initiatives. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology is responsible for school meals

and nutrition education for children. The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries tackles food supply, production and food culture, and the Consumer Affairs Agency is responsible for nutritional facts labels.

- School Lunches

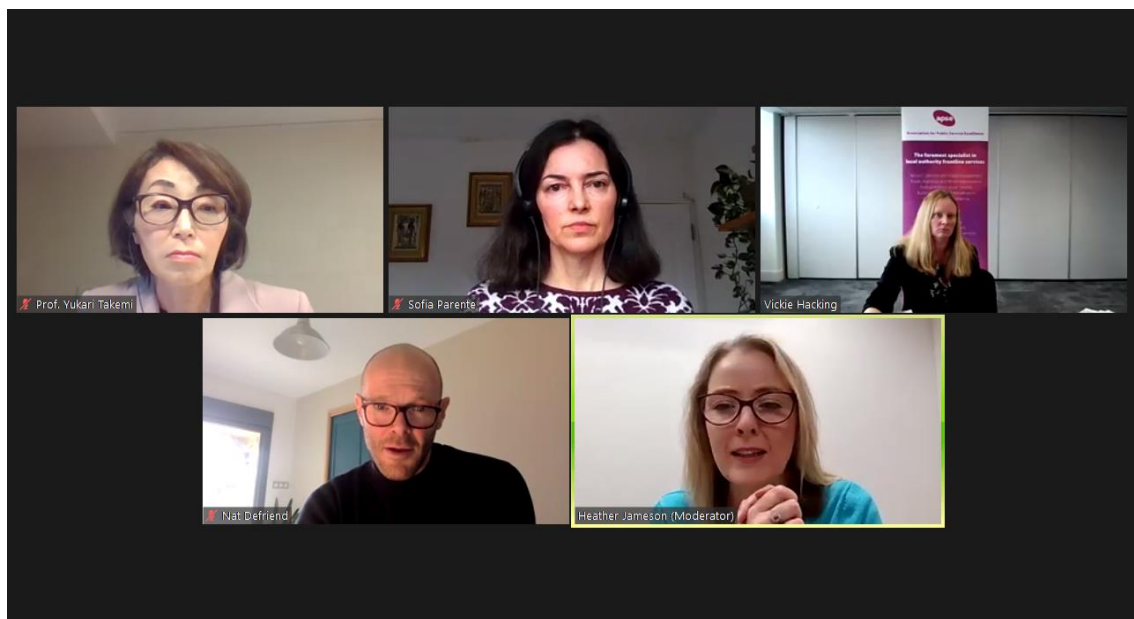
- In 1889, free school lunches began to be offered to children from poorer families.
- After the Second World War with the support of international organisations, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, the Ministry of Health and Welfare and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry endorsed school lunches.
- After that, in 1954 the School Lunch Act was put into effect. In 2008 it was revised and the focus of the policy changed from 'the improvement of eating habits' to 'promotion of nutrition education'
- Now 98.5% of elementary schools and 86.6% of junior high schools offer school lunches.
- School lunches provide a third of daily energy and nutritional requirements. All children or students should have a well-balanced meal, regardless of economic disparities.
- For example, a child from a low-income household in 5th year at elementary school consumes less protein and energy on a day without school lunch than a day when they attend school.
- Furthermore, since 2005 nutrition teachers who are license dietitians started to be responsible for school lunches and provide guidance on food.

- Promoting Food Education

- The Basic Act on *Shokuiku* (food and nutrition education) was enacted in 2005. The aim of the Act is to help people to cultivate a healthy mind and body throughout their lives.
- Every five years, the government revises the general plan for *shokuiku*. The *shokuiku* plan covers health and eating habits, the cycle from food production to dining table, local production for local consumption and food culture.
- It indicates 10 points in Japanese dietary guidelines, including enjoying meals, and maintaining the balance of meals based on a grain dish, as well as fish & meat dishes (main dish) and vegetable dishes (side dishes).
- If children find meal times an enjoyable experience, there is a positive association with balanced and good eating habits once they become adults.
- Elsewhere, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries created an eating habits guidelines and balanced meals guide.
- *Shokuiku* is promoted by national government, local government, schools, farmers, health care professionals and volunteers.
- The fourth *Shokuiku* plan promotes nutrition education from many angles including social, environmental, cultural, digitisation aspects.
- Since the corona pandemic, the quality of food is declining, especially in low-income households, and the importance of school lunches has been recognised once again.

- Health Japan 21
- In order to extend healthy life expectancy and ensure health equity in the field of food, it is necessary to have 'proper food intake' in order to improve 'nutrition status', 'behaviour change' in order to improve nutritional intake and 'environmental change' to support individual's behaviour changes.
- Case Study
- The Japanese Society of Hypertension has certified low-sodium products. Many companies are independently and actively developing delicious low sodium foods.
- Smart Meals, a new certification system for food retailers, restaurants, and worksite cafeterias which continually provide well-balanced meals for customers in a healthy environment
- In 2021, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare established the 'Committee for the Promotion of a Naturally Healthy and Sustainable Food Environment'
- Japan's *Shokuiku* policy was implemented based on laws and systems, in collaboration with various ministries, involving even more stakeholders at the local level.
- A comprehensive approach is being implemented, involving health, food systems, environment and food culture. Recently, there has been a focus on support for low-income households.

2. Panel Discussion



- Nat Defriend – Participatory City Foundation, Interim Chief Executive Officer

- Yukari Takemi's presentation showed how Japan's education system is linked to improvements in children's nutrition.
- I work to strengthen community connections in East London's Barking and Dagenham. I believe that by improving nutrition, growing vegetables, having a food supply that doesn't rely on imports and improving cooking skills, we can create a community culture.
- Without close cooperation with local government, our work would not be possible. Local government has various methods through national policies.
- Our NGO also collaborates with companies opening parks, makes vegetable gardens in local communities and holds various activities to encourage greenery. I believe that through these activities, local people will be able to cooperate with each other to create a better food environment.

o Vickie Hacking – APSE, Principal Advisor on School Food and Secretariat Lead for the All-Party Parliamentary Group on School Food

- In the UK, local authorities started introducing school lunch programmes in 1903. In 1980, local authorities decided to hold bids for school lunch providers in order to prioritise value, leading to a decline in quality.
- Nowadays children from low-income families are offered free school lunch. However, the lunches are not free unless you apply for them, so some eligible children do not receive them.
- Due to decentralisation, there are differences in school lunch provision. In England school lunch providers are decided by schools, in Scotland and Wales they are decided by local government.
- Corona magnified disparities and poverty levels rose. Many children received free school lunch coupons but money did not solve the problem. General nutritional standards and social and educational factors are important. Also, the state budget to pay school lunch providers did not increase while prices and labour costs rose, making it impossible to keep up with rising prices.
- In Scotland there is a management system that monitors the quality of school lunch. However, there isn't one in England.
- During the pandemic children got used to things like delivery food, so it was necessary to encourage them to eat school lunches again. Also, the number of low-income families increased, leading to an increase in the number of children eligible for free school lunches. For people who only just didn't meet the requirements for free lunches, there were families who had to make the choice between paying for food or for heating.
- In Scotland, efforts are being made to create new standards for food products, increase the budget for school lunches and increase the number of free lunches. In Wales, there is a policy that children who are not yet of school age are also eligible for free lunches. The Levelling Up White Paper in England outlined intentions to create monitors to check the quality of school lunches. Also, a website was created to improve the food environment in schools. There are plans to allocate a budget to train a person responsible for the quality of school lunches.

- After hearing about the situation in Japan, I feel that it is necessary to work together, from national to local government and regional organisations.
- APPG has told the government about these problems. As there is still a lack of evidence, data is needed to prove the effect and make policy decisions.

- Sofia Parente – Sustain, Sustainable Food Places Campaigns and Policy Coordinator
- Food partnerships bring together local government, volunteer groups, public organisations and food industry stakeholders.
- I work with Sustainable Food Places, a UK network which connects regional food partnerships, supporting the creation of good practice in all aspects of healthy sustainable food.
- Compared to Japan, the UK consistently lacks national policy relating to food and nutrition. There also hasn't been any promotion of food related planning by local authorities.
- The UK has enacted plans for food related policy and the recently published Levelling Up white paper had a section on food. While it is good that the government is trying to work with local authorities, it is also essential to increase the budget for public health, promote free school lunches, and implement programmes to improve.
- In the UK a third of children from low-income families do not receive free lunches, so overall only 8% are benefitting, as only 33% eat school lunches. It's interesting that Japan has such a high uptake of school lunches due to its comprehensive national policy.
- Some schemes provide pregnant women and their families with vouchers to buy vegetables and milk, but the percentage of eligible households and uptake are low.
- In the UK, it is a challenge to comply with nutritional standards and procure local and sustainable food. Only a small number of companies provide the majority of school lunches in the UK. The ingredients also often come from around the world, so local production is difficult.
- In general, Japan approaches healthy eating as a positive thing which extends healthy life expectancy. In the UK, healthy eating is a way to tackle problems such as obesity.
- In the UK, a tax on sugary soft drinks was introduced as a countermeasure for obesity, resulting in a reduction in consumption. However, we are waiting for the publication of the food strategy white paper which will contain policies that address both health and sustainability.
- Healthy meals are sustainable meals. We are trying to increase the production and consumption of sustainable fruit and vegetables.
- A cooperative approach to food strategy at the local level is necessary.

3. Q&A Session

Question 1: In Japan, there are different ways of making food, such as fermenting pickles. Do you think that these methods will be passed on to the next generation?

Answer 1 (Professor Takemi): Cooking skills are valued, we teach children how to cook. In session 2 there will be examples from Obama City, such as the case study of childrens' cookery classes which are held there.

Question 2: In the UK, obesity is becoming a problem. Is Japan facing a similar problem?

Answer 2 (Professor Takemi): In Japan, obesity is becoming a problem among middle age men. However, there is also a problem with young women and the elderly being underweight and malnourished.

Session 2

1. Food-related initiatives for prevention of lifestyle related diseases

Chihiro Oizumi: Senior Section Chief, Food Education Promotion Office, Health Promotion Division, Sanjo City, Niigata Prefecture

- In Sanjo City, medical expenses increased due to high blood pressure and cardiovascular disease caused by excessive consumption of salt.
- Therefore, a study was held exploring salt content. For many generations, salt intake exceeded the target by more than five grammes. The study also provided information about eating habits that lead to excessive salt intake.
- As a result of this study, tactics were carried out to naturally reduce salt intake without people realising.
- In order to reduce salt intake without consumers realising, salt levels in processed foods were reduced without compromising on taste, and a new logo mark was introduced which didn't create the image of a low-salt food.
- A smart meals project was introduced, which features restaurants which promoted local food and offered healthy meals.
- To ensure compliance with the standards, a city nutritionist gave advice on recipes and nutritional calculations to participating restaurants promoting local production for local consumption. After certification, the city's nutritionist displayed stickers in stores and publicised the program through leaflets.

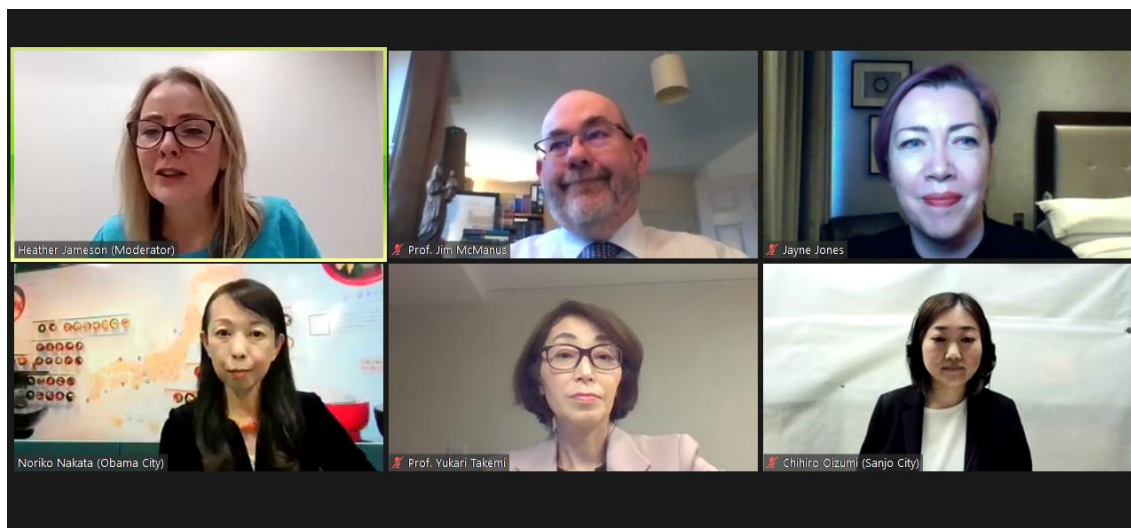
- In addition, a pamphlet on the proper use of salt was produced as an educational project. While using the pamphlet to explain a food model at group health checkups, dietary health checks were also conducted. These checkups revealed that the number of people who do not look at sodium labels is increasing, and we would like to raise awareness about this in the future.
- Next year, we would like to measure urinary salt content during health checkups and check any changes from 2015.

2. Using Culinary Culture for Community Development

Noriko Nakata, Manager, Food-based Community Development Division, Planning Department, Obama City Government, Fukui Prefecture

- Obama City was the first place in Japan to enact food related regulations. Over about 20 years, the 'Obama City Food Strategy for Community Development Law' has engaged in food-based economic activities, environmental protection, health and welfare and dietary education.
- In Obama, a museum for promoting dietary education called the 'Miketsukuni Wakasa Obama Food Culture Museum' was established. In the museum, replicas of meals are displayed, visitors can make chopsticks and cooking lessons are held in the kitchen studio.
- Obama city has a 'no one left behind' approach for dietary education. In order to achieve this, they coined the two expressions 'life-long dietary education' and 'dietary education as a compulsory subject'.
- As part of the 'Kids Kitchen' programme children prepare fish and can learn about how 'eating is receiving a life'. They also gain cooking knowledge and skills, improve their powers of concentration and attain a sense of accomplishment, teamwork and an appreciation of food.
- Elementary school students and Junior High School students have the opportunity to take part in cooking classes as part of the school curriculum. By reaching out to children, the city also indirectly had an impact on adults.
- School lunches use ingredients from the local area and each school prepares its own meals.
- Every year a Sea Bream School Lunch Day is held. It is good practice for holding chopsticks and eating fish properly.
- A survey about dietary education was given to 20-year-olds in Obama City. According to the results, not only did the food education they received when they were children have a positive impact on their adult eating habits, but also gave them stronger feelings of pride and love of their hometown. This was connected to their own confidence in themselves.

2. Panel Discussion



- Jayne F Jones, Argyll and Bute Council, Commercial Manager
 - Scotland has a progressive approach to food, especially for school lunches.
 - After the pandemic and due to the effect of the increase in prices, we understood the importance of supporting local agricultural products and various projects are underway.
 - For example, in Scotland there is support for young people. Children in year 5 (9-10 years old) can receive a free school lunch and it's under consideration whether to extend this to years 6 and 7. Also, there are pilot schemes for free breakfasts, milk and extending free lunches to secondary school children. Pre-school children who attend nursery or childcare can also receive a free school lunch.
 - The Scottish Government aims to provide everyone who lives in Scotland with a sustainable food system under the Good Food Nation Bill which is under consideration. National and local government will be required to make a local food action plan.
 - Consultations have started about how local authorities can formulate food action plans involving the community in order to remove the need for food banks and emergency food assistance
 - I agree with the message in Obama City's presentation that 'Children never forget the things that they accomplish for themselves'. I got some ideas about how to make changes in Scotland and the rest of the UK and the importance of the value and fun of food culture.
- Professor Jim McManus, Director of Public Health at Hertfordshire County Council and President of the Association of Directors of Public Health
 - The pandemic has highlighted the significant level of inequalities.
 - Watching today's presentation, I feel that we must re-examine the UK's food strategy. It needs to be improved to be more systematic and comprehensive across the UK.

- There are many things that England can still learn regarding food policy from Scotland and other countries. At the moment the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is not well enough coordinated with other departments and their policies aren't comprehensive enough.
 - Hertfordshire has a supplier who is able to provide quality school lunches to 600 schools in the area but it's only a tiny part of what needs to be done.
 - It's not only high blood pressure and cardiovascular disease, we also need a systematic approach to combat obesity and cancer. Not only do we need to promote efforts to get rid of health problems related to poor diet, good food supply, good food demand and good food culture is needed. There is much that we can learn from the Japanese case studies about these topics.
 - Just like Sanjo City's policies to reduce salt consumption, it's necessary to re-examine the needs of the food supply, bring in the industrial world and raise interest in better food. We need to tackle these issues not only at schools, but also in the workplace.
 - England's Levelling Up white paper did not incorporate the lessons learnt from Wales' wellbeing policies or Scotland's health policies. Food supply and food culture are closely linked and these problems can only be solved with the cooperation of the whole of the UK.
 - You can buy and eat food that you like, and if you become ill there is free healthcare. The situation hasn't changed for 60 years, and it has become a problem for us.
- Professor Yukari Takemi, Kagawa Nutrition University
 - Within the same food policies, Sanjo city's policies focus on health and Obama city focusses on food culture, regional vitality and community building policies. Both are quite advanced for Japan.
 - It's not possible to do the same things across the whole of Japan, and we've learnt a lot from the UK about policies related to the provision of school lunches and reduction of salt in diets.

3. Q & A Session

Question 1: What efforts have national, regional and local governments undertaken to reduce fast food provisions and outlets?

Answer 1 (Professor Takemi): Although there aren't any national initiatives or regulations, there are some education policies for children and adults encouraging them not to eat too much fast food. Fast food companies are also making small efforts towards providing healthier products. For example, there is an effort to educate children and make teaching materials, but the products are fundamentally high calorie and high fat, so nutritional education is the best way to educate them. In Japan, people don't tend to like food regulations.

Question 2: In the UK it seems unlikely that fast food restaurants would cooperate with measures like those enacted in Sanjo City, how is it in Japan? Also, Sanjo city seems to have focused on salt reduction, are there also measures to reduce fat?

Answer 2 (Oizumi): In Sanjo City, originally, we worked with supermarkets with local headquarters and fast-food restaurants didn't take part. Also, our main goal was to reduce high blood pressure, so our focus was on salt reduction. Although excessive fat intake is also a problem, we first wished to address salt intake.

Question 3: Is fat and calorie density much more of a problem than salt in the UK?

Answer 3: (McManus): It depends on the area, but salt has received attention because it has an effect on hypertension and heart disease, so various efforts are being made. Fat is also becoming a problem but there is also some confusion within the UK regarding sugar. There tends to be too much focus on one ingredient, such as salt, sugar or fat. We have been gradually working on legal restrictions on fast food, regulating advertising, and getting businesses involved, but it has not been easy. There are good examples of food-related initiatives in the UK, but they seem to lack cohesion.

Question 4: Are there any advanced food related case studies in the UK from childhood to adulthood?

Answer 4 (McManus): It really depends on the place and the town. There are various great initiatives happening in Scotland. England's local government has comprehensive policies to tackle obesity. Lambeth in London has food policy covering the whole of Lambeth and initiatives are underway at the University of Liverpool and the University of Glasgow. There is also a pilot scheme to tackle obesity in young people, and a project in Bristol to provide locally sourced sustainable food. In this way there are various projects being tackled, but they are all localised to one area.

Question 5: In the UK, the urban environment can have a detrimental effect on the nutritional quality of the local community. Is the situation the same in Japan?

Answer 5 (Nakata): In Obama City environmental conservation is considered extremely important. It's important to have a comprehensive approach to environmental conservation, food education and economic revitalisation. We are particularly active in creating initiatives for marine focussed environmental conservation.

Question 6: Are businesses incentivised or rewarded to take part in these kinds of initiatives?

Answer 6 (Nakata): In the case of Obama City, we attach importance to initiatives that require the cooperation of citizens, businesses and local authorities to work together towards a shared goal. In this way, our initiatives can be achieved from various standpoints.

Answer 6 (Oizumi): In Sanjo City there are no incentives, companies are motivated by wanting to take part and contribute to society. Also, they receive positive feedback from their customers, which contributes to their motivation.

Question 7: In Japan, how many cities and other municipalities have a food strategy, and is it a legal duty?

Answer 7: (Professor Takemi): About 80 percent of prefectures in Japan should have a food strategy. The contents of each strategy is different for each local authority. All local authorities have a strategy related to food and health.

Question 8: I have heard that organic food is not widely available. What percentage of local production for local consumption is organic food?

Answer 8 (Professor Takemi): The overall percentage is certainly small, and we do not have data for each region. There are also connections with environmental problems, so the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries has started initiatives to promote organic produce, but progress is slow.

Question 9: What is the situation in Scotland in regards to organic and locally produced food?

Answer 9 (Jones): Last week there were reports of a decrease in the amount of organic food being used in school meals and the public sector in the UK. However, in Scotland, 18 out of 32 local authorities have been certified to show that they use locally produced, sustainable and organic food in their school lunches. Furthermore, in Scotland there is a commitment to double the amount of land being used to grow organic produce by 2023. I have been working with many stakeholders in order to find a way to do this. One of the key pillars of this is how to use more organics in Scottish school meals.

Question 10: In the UK, people prefer quantity rather than quality when considering cost. In Japan, people seem to prefer quality. How can we instil this attitude in the UK?

Answer 10 (Professor Takemi): Even in Japan it depends on the person. People who are interested in food and those who are above a certain age and concerned about their health care about food, but many younger generations are more concerned about quantity rather than quality. Furthermore, just like the UK, people with lower incomes are more concerned with ensuring quantity of food rather than quality.