



## Law and Non-Communicable Diseases Unit

# Healthy food provision: stranded between corporate power and corporate powerlessness

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My paper summarises a longer piece of research that I have recently undertaken as part of the EU-funded I.Family Study <http://www.ifamilystudy.eu>. I will present and defend the following claims: (1) corporations are not free market actors, but arise thanks to a specific form of state intervention; (2) contemporary food markets are structured by corporate activity (e.g. the well-known 'hour-glass' between producers and consumers); (3) the resulting markets are bound to promote processed foods, which are invariably less healthy than whole foods; (4) though very powerful in some regards, corporations are powerless to resist this logic; hence (5) the only tenable way to uphold public health is greater statutory regulation of corporate activity; (6) such regulation should not be understood as restrictive, but rather as enabling corporate actors to respect important public goods. At a more philosophical level, I also want to make this overarching argument: we should resist the careless (or disingenuous) assumption that government interventions (e.g. to create or modify corporate markets) are opposed to freedom; any sensible 'restriction' will uphold some sort of freedom; the crucial question is always what sorts of freedom we should value.

I am Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at Lancaster University. My research interests fall across ethics, political theory and applied ethics. One of my main interests, in all three of these areas, is responsibility – both conceptually and in terms of its practical aspects. For the past ten years, I have been involved in collaborative research on children, health and public policy, including the EU-funded I.Family study, which investigates diet and health-related behaviours in a large cohort of families across Europe. My recent interest in corporations touches on all of these areas: corporate responsibilities and accountability, their relation to political authority, and their impact on public health.



LAW & NCD UNIT  
UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> March

4.00-6pm

University of Liverpool,  
Rendall Building,  
Lecture Theatre 7

[Please register your attendance.](#)



### Discussants

- Neville Rigby,  
International Obesity  
Forum



- Professor Simon Capewell,  
University of Liverpool



- Professor Amandine Garde,  
University of Liverpool

