Henry Dimbleby on how to grow as appetites shrink

By **Ian Quinn** | 23 July 2026 | **7 min read**

Former health tsar Henry Dimbleby is now ‘completely focused on the commercial’ – and believes brands must prioritise health to survive

Five years ago his National Food Strategy report called for government intervention and a swathe of “sin taxes” to regulate an industry that had grown rich by feeding consumers’ primeval desire for calories.

In a world where food had historically been scarce, argued then health tsar Henry Dimbleby, minds were hard-wired to “pounce” on sources of fat, sugar and salt – and the UK’s food industry was providing too much opportunity.

But a major report by Dimbleby’s new venture Bramble Intelligence now warns that far from getting fat on the profits of HFSS sales, the food industry faces “barbarians at the door” for profits.

Henry Dimbleby speaking at a conference in London in 2023. Back then, he was accusing the industry of feeding a 'junk food cycle'. Now he's warning of £6bn in lost sales if companies do not adapt to reduced cravings

It predicts UK consumers will consume 5% fewer calories by 2035 and food companies will lose up to £6bn in sales unless they adapt.

So why has he had such a seemingly drastic change of heart? And what kinds of companies will thrive in the age of weight-loss drugs, AI and diet-related diagnostic technology?

10 UK&I food brands on the Bramble 40 list

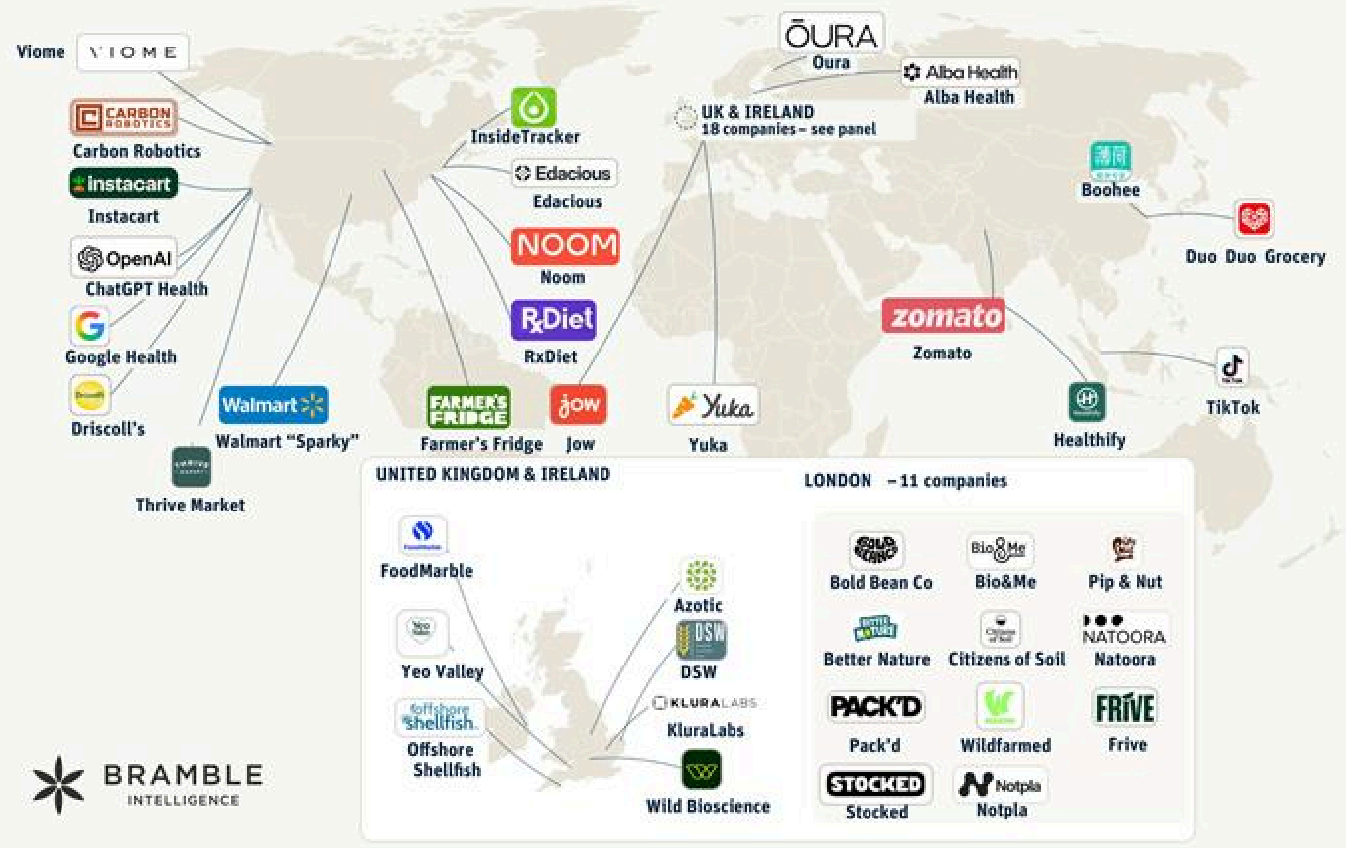
- **Better Nature:** “Has shown a whole-bean fermented protein can win mainstream listings.”
- **Bio&Me:** “Built a multicategory breakfast range around the benefits of gut health.”
- **Bold Bean Co:** “Used community and recipe content to create new demand for beans.”
- **Citizens of Soil:** “Its single-origin extra-virgin olive oils come from regenerative farms around the Mediterranean, with producers paid above market rate.”
- **Frive:** “Convenience does not have to compromise quality. Frive has proven consumer demand for a better ready meal.”
- **Natoora:** “Sources fruit & vegetables from a direct network of more than 600 independent growers, selecting varieties for flavour and quality.”
- **Pack’d:** “Has won mainstream listings for a no-planning, no-waste frozen format” of fruit & vegetables.
- **Pip & Nut:** “Has taken a cleaner nut butter to the top of a mainstream category.”
- **Stocked:** “Chef-cooked dishes frozen into small blocks you portion to your appetite and household size, with no additives.”
- **Yeo Valley:** “Britain’s biggest organic brand is taking natural protein mainstream across dairy, from high-protein yoghurt to kefir and milk.”

Source: The Bramble Intelligence 40

Dimbleby tells The Grocer the launch of Bramble Intelligence, in January 2024, was widely misunderstood. “Everyone thought Bramble was a think tank or a campaigning organisation,” he says. “It probably took a year for us to get the message across that we are completely focused on the commercial – I’m leaving the government to get on with it.

“We are trying to help companies navigate challenges. Now, unlike back then, you can make money out of doing healthy.”

The first of two companion reports by the company, titled Tomorrow’s Appetites, argues that consumers have a newfound ability to break free of the established cycle. This, the report says, is the biggest revolution in food since the rise of supermarkets in the 1970s.



Source: The Bramble Intelligence 40

Weight-loss drugs

Weight-loss drugs and the use of AI and technology-driven personalised diet apps are, Dimbleby and his fellow Bramble Intelligence experts argue, "forces of disruption" greater than government regulation could achieve.

"Discretionary, high-margin, promotion-heavy categories like snacks and alcohol" could see a third of operating profits wiped out in 10 years, the report says.

Dimbleby adds: "In the food strategy I talked about an interaction that was going wrong. I said that it wasn't necessarily because food companies were bad, it was because it was difficult to make money doing the good stuff. But what we're seeing now is the unravelling of millions of years of evolution."

The report says companies that built their businesses on cravings for salt, sugar and fat are being challenged by technologies that did not exist when the food strategy came out.

Source: Getty Images

Five years ago, appetite-suppressing drugs were confined to diabetes treatment with “limited public awareness”, while diet related diagnostics were lab-based and costly. Consumer AI apps were also unavailable.

Today, weight-loss drugs are a frontline weapon for the government and NHS, and 3.2 million UK adults have used them, a number only set to rise after the pill form of WeGovy received UK regulatory approval in June.

Meanwhile, ChatGPT has 230 million global users, including 30 million a month in the UK.

Continuous glucose monitors, metabolic breath tests and other diagnostics are sold to consumers for under £100 a month.

“The only shift in the food market we’ve seen before that was this big was in the ’70s with the rise of the supermarkets, but that was the food industry disrupting itself,” says Dimbleby. “This time it’s from outside.”

But the Tomorrow’s Appetites report argues there are “opportunities as well as threats”.

It sets out four new sources of profitable growth, available to companies that make it easy to eat well, make food that nourishes, have ingredients that the public trust, and can find a place in the new “diet and health feedback loop”.

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The second report, the Bramble Intelligence 40, picks out companies that are doing this in the UK and abroad.

“This is a showcase of companies, from early-stage innovators to giants such as Google, moving to capture the biggest shift of profits in food for half a century,” says Bramble managing partner Chris Mitchell.

“We’ve chosen companies bringing fresh ideas to these new sources of growth, varied in size, scope and model.” Not all are “guaranteed to succeed” but each has “rising revenue, growing users or a large installed base”.

The list does not seek to be comprehensive. “We’re trying to showcase both what is the value proposition to the industry and what other companies can learn from these examples,” says Mitchell. “We’re pointing towards where the momentum is and where profit is going to be achieved as consumer behaviour and discounter preferences undergo this enormous shift.”

Source: House of Lords 2024 / photography by Roger Harris
Henry Dimbleby at the House of Lords Food, Diet and Obesity Committee inquiry

The fate of the tobacco industry is, Mitchell says, an example of what can happen when there is a huge consumer shift away from established trends, only this time it will be faster.

“Smoking was a 60-year decline at about 3% per year. I think we’re going to see this transition but it’s going to be faster. With examples like that you didn’t have anything like these appetite-suppressing drugs which could change behaviour. It’s an accelerant.”

Dimbleby believes there doesn’t have to be an unhappy ending for the food industry.

“What this means is that people are valuing food in a different way. They are literally spending more time thinking about what they buy, looking at labels, and in the end food is going to be seen as one of the ways of achieving healthy life years, the scarcest resource any of us have.

“I think what we could see is the amount of money households spend on food increasing.

“It’s slightly counter-intuitive but while our calculation is there will be 5% fewer calories, that doesn’t mean less money.

“You might see an increase in the next five or 10 years.”

Not all Dimbleby’s ideas find universal support, but a 10-year plan for growth sounds like something many in the food industry could get behind.