

Scotland's Good Food Nation Bill¹

Introduction:

The Scottish Government announced new legislation to support a transition to Scotland becoming a Good Food Nation in their September 2016 Programme for Government. This continued the commitment made in the SNP's election manifesto, and builds on their publication of a Good Food Nation policy document in 2014. Scottish Labour and the Scottish Green Party also committed to crosscutting legislation for the food system in their 2016 election manifestoes.

The scope of the legislation remains unclear; becoming a Good Food Nation – one in which everyone has access to the nutritious food they need, where diet-related diseases are in decline, food production is environmentally sound, work in the food sector is rewarding, and people value good food² – requires action on multiple levels across a wide range of issues.

The Scottish Government have stepped up to the challenge of providing leadership, aiming for a complete transformation of Scotland's reputation with regard to food, from being known for its poor diet, to becoming an exemplar Good Food Nation. The introduction of the Good Food Nation Bill is one element of this transformation. Developing a statutory framework to draw together food policies, outline ways of working that facilitate continued progress, and establish a clear trajectory towards a Good Food Nation, will not only support a shift in Scotland's reputation, it will be integral to Scotland delivering on existing international commitments and urgent domestic challenges.

The Good Food Nation Bill & Sustainable Development Goals

Scotland was among the first countries to adopt the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in July 2015, with an aspiration to provide international leadership on reducing inequality.³ The 17 goals are ambitious and far-reaching, with associated targets that demand significant progress by 2030. However, it is also the case that the goals are interrelated, and advancement on each goal will support progress on others.

Food policy is key to achieving these Sustainable Development Goals. The examples below provide some initial indications of the imperatives for food policy, as well as some suggestions to make progress. It is by no means a comprehensive list of issues that the Good Food Nation Bill can address, and is

¹ This briefing follows the first two events in the Scottish Food Coalition's Good Food Nation series, where Professor Corinna Hawkes presented on the links with the Sustainable Development Goals and UN Special Rapporteur Hilal Elver outlined the Right to Food framework.

² Scottish Government (2014), Good Food Nation Policy Document

³ <https://news.gov.scot/news/leading-the-way-in-tackling-inequality>

only a selection of the 17 goals – many more of which have a direct relationship with food.

Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.

- We currently do not have data on the levels of household food insecurity in Scotland⁴; however, indicators such as food bank usage have shown it is a growing problem. We know that the poorest in society generally have the least nutritious diets, and we are not setting up children with the best start in life. There is little support for sustainable agriculture, and no leadership to move towards a model of food production that values the quality of food and protects resources for the future.
- Improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture requires a new approach to the mechanisms in our food system: these can no longer be seen as separate issues. Farmers could be supported to prioritise environmental stewardship and nutritional density in food production. This support could include guaranteed markets in to public procurement and schemes that give preferential access to deprived communities, ensuring that the quality of food you eat does not depend on the amount of money in your pockets.

Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

- Since the Scottish Dietary Goals were established 15 years ago, they have been consistently missed, resulting in an unsustainable burden of ill health for Scottish society and its institutions. Obesity rates in Scotland are amongst the highest in the world.⁵ Obesity harms many aspects of health, including increased risk of type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and eleven types of cancers.
- Using planning policies and other regulatory measures to shift the food environment from being conducive to obesity to supportive of healthy diets, is a critical intervention needed for Scotland to make collective progress on health.

Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

- Ironically, many of those working in Scotland's Food & Drink sector (which accounts for 1 in 7 jobs in Scotland) are food insecure, as jobs in

⁴ The Scottish Government have committed to collecting data on household food insecurity, with the first figures expected in September 2017 as part of the Scottish Health Survey.

⁵ Scottish Government (2016), Scottish Health Survey

this sector are among the least well paid and most precarious. Wages in all parts of the food system – agriculture, manufacturing, retail, hospitality and services – are below the UK average.

- Valuing those who work to put food on our plates, through better wages and conditions is essential to becoming a Good Food Nation; investing in meaningful employment and training opportunities will also be necessary to promote the creativity, innovation and joined-up thinking that will enable this better food future.

Goal 12: *Ensure sustainable production and consumption patterns*

- Food is wasted across the supply chain: in households and businesses, as well as retail, manufacturing, and on-farm, costing Scotland an estimated £1 billion a year.⁶ This waste of resources, as well as the greenhouse gas emissions generated through processing, manufacturing, transport and landfill, places an unnecessary burden on our ecosystems. Production practices are also unsustainable; for example, the continued overuse of antibiotics in farming is contributing to antibiotic resistance in people as well as farm animals.
- The Scottish Government has a target of reducing food waste by a third by 2025. This will not be met without programmes that make the links across the food system. Food waste is not only a problem with distribution mechanisms; at its core is an issue around how we collectively approach food.

Goal 13: *Take urgent action to tackle climate change and all its impacts*

- The food system significantly contributes to climate change, and is also impacted by increasingly unpredictable climatic conditions. Agriculture accounts for nearly a quarter of Scotland's total greenhouse gas emissions; nearly a quarter of which come from nitrous oxide⁷, principally due to the application of synthetic nitrogen-based fertiliser to arable soils and leaching.
- Promoting agroecology and environmentally sound agriculture can make a significant contribution to reducing Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions. Until now, agriculture has been lagging behind other sectors in emissions reductions, and promoting organic and agroecological production has been seen as a separate issue to improving nutrition and access to quality food.

Goal 15: *Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems,*

⁶ Zero Waste Scotland, <http://www.zerowastescotland.org.uk/Looking-For-Ways-To-Reduce-Food-Waste>

⁷ Scottish Government (2016) Scottish Greenhouse Gas Emissions 2014, <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0050/00503570.pdf>

sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

- Biodiversity and ecosystem functioning in Scotland is in decline. Increased use of chemical inputs including pesticides and fertilisers over the last 60 years, changes in land management practices, habitat loss and climate change are cited by environmental agencies as the principal causes.⁸
- Again, the promotion of agroecology and environmentally sound agriculture will mean that future generations do not need to live in a world less alive than today. Well-functioning ecosystems are critical for resilience in food production, as they can be more adaptive to changing conditions; healthy ecosystems also result in more nutritionally dense food.

From these few examples, we can see how the tasks of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and becoming a Good Food Nation are inextricably linked. It is also clear that we can act in ways that bring multiple benefits, delivering on distinct objectives simultaneously. Conversely, this may not always be the case; some approaches may deliver progress on one objective but regression on another. For both reasons, mechanisms to facilitate communication and productive working across government departments at all levels will be crucial.

The Good Food Nation Bill is an instrument that can provide an overarching framework and facilitate a coordinated approach to reducing inequality and achieving sustainable development.

The Good Food Nation Bill & the Right to Food

Enacting legislation that can stimulate changes at the core of the food system, and across such a breadth of issues is undoubtedly a challenge. However, there are international frameworks, to which Scotland has subscribed, that can guide this process.

Article 11 of the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states the right to an adequate standard of living, including the right to food.⁹ The details of what this right encompasses have been worked out over decades, with the United Nations framework outlining the right to food in terms of accessibility, adequacy, and availability, with eight core pillars.

Accessible: Financially
Accessible: Geographically
Adequate: Dietary need
Adequate: Free from adverse substances

⁸ Scottish Government (2016), Scottish Rural Development Plan 2014-2020

⁹ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx>

Adequate: Culturally appropriate – choice & dignity
Available: Land and other resources
Available: Processing, distribution & markets
Available: Now and into the future

This framework takes into account both our individual right to sufficient, nutritious food, as well as our collective right to a sustainable food system, where our capacity to produce and eat food in the future is not compromised. It establishes principles concerning not only the quality of food, but also how we access food, the production of food, and who has access to the means of the production.

These principles, that underpin our right to food, can form the basis of coherent and progressive food system governance, by which actions and programmes can be measured against.

This established and robust international framework can support Scotland to achieve its aspiration of becoming a Good Food Nation. The transformation of Scotland's food system will require action at all levels: individuals, communities, public bodies, local authorities and national government will all need to be part of the change. Nevertheless, the legislative underpinning – incorporating the right to food in to Scot's law – provides the foundation. Cross cutting challenges need cross-cutting governance frameworks; moving forwards will require establishing collective responsibility, as well as clear ambitions and accountability mechanisms.