

Executive summary

We have plenty of land in Scotland, and plenty of sea, and plenty of skilled people, scientists and innovators. There's no reason why we shouldn't have plenty of good food for everyone.

But people in Scotland are going hungry or are reliant on foodbanks in order to eat. At the same time, jobs in the food sector are insecure and poorly paid. Industrial scale agriculture is contributing massively to climate change and harming our wildlife. Farm animals suffer whilst antibiotic resistance continues apace, and more and more of us are suffering from poor health. Our farmers and fisherman cannot make a decent living.

Our food policies are not working for our people or our planet. We need to find a better way to feed ourselves without damaging the world we live in. This document from the Scottish Food Coalition sets out our aspirations for better food. As organisations, we have come together because we believe everyone should be able to enjoy food. People alive today and into the future should experience plentiful, tasty, nutritious food.

At the moment, our food system is characterised by inequalities and exploitation. People face the double burden of poverty and ill health, whilst our natural resources, animals, and workforce are exploited. To reimagine the food system, so that everybody can access enough good food, we need to see that all these problems are connected and we need to question the very system that underpins our approach to food. Tinkering at the edges, or focusing on any one of these issues without consideration of the others, is not enough. They are all urgent issues, and all related. We want a just transition to a new food system; one founded on the principles of social and environmental justice.

The good news is, transformational change of Scotland's food system offers tremendous opportunities. We could be happier and healthier, living in a more equal society with a more resilient economy, and a thriving natural environment too.

Transformation is entirely possible. We already have Government commitments to address inequality, climate change, declining wildlife and poor health. We now need to take action, using our resources strategically and working together to create a food system fit for purpose.

This report articulates, in four sections, what a different food system could look like, why we can't continue with business as usual, and some initial steps for making the change.

First, 'People Matter' makes the case for a food system that values people. Everybody should be able to access food with dignity; people working in the food sector should be valued; and we should all have a say over the rules that govern our food system. We need the Scottish Government to:

- + Take immediate action to prevent food poverty by providing an adequate safety net for those affected through the Scottish Welfare Fund and other crisis support services.
- + Enshrine the Right to Food into Scottish Law.
- + Encourage all employers to become accredited Scottish Living Wage employers, and continue and expand the work of the Agricultural Wages Board.
- + Use new powers to both improve the value of social security support in Scotland and the operation of those benefits that are being devolved, so that everyone can afford to buy healthy food.
- + Create structures to ensure the governance of our food system is more democratic, facilitating greater public participation in food policy and reining in the power of corporations.



Pittendreich Farm near Milnathort, Flickr Creative Commons.

Second, ‘The Environment Matters’ highlights the need to prioritise sustainability so that we can produce food, both now and into the future. This means taking greater care of the natural environment on which food production itself depends. It also means reducing, and ultimately ending, the wider negative environmental impacts of our whole food system, including its impacts on our climate. We need the Scottish Government to:

- + Establish agroecology as the underlying principle of farming in Scotland, and set out a programme to embed it in practice.
- + Champion a reform of the CAP that supports and develops truly sustainable production.
- + Ensure more effective implementation and enforcement of existing environmental legislation throughout the food supply chain.
- + Take a whole system approach to reducing the impact of our food on the climate.

Third, ‘It’s about more than food’ shows that what we eat, and how much of it are critical determinants of our health. The ‘Scottish diet’ has won no accolades and there is a general consensus that the food habits of Scottish citizens need to change, and quickly. But food is about a lot more than calories: we know that food can nourish us in so many more ways than simply the physiological. Improving our food culture and engaging more with the food we eat can have wide ranging benefits. We need the Scottish Government to:

- + Lead by example, with all food purchased with public money and served in the public sector, being nutritionally balanced and sustainably sourced.
- + Introduce a retailers and caterer’s levy, which would require operators of multiple outlets to

report periodically on the nutritional composition of their sales and pay a levy on the difference between their sales and the national nutritional targets.

- + Support community food initiatives, helping to provide access to resources such as land, as well as training and development opportunities.
- + Develop ‘whole school food plans’ which connect the curriculum with catering and the community, link schools with local farms and embed food into teacher education on sustainability.

Fourth, ‘Short supply chains go further’ points to how our current models of food production, distribution and supply are increasingly large scale and industrialised. Fewer and fewer individuals benefit economically from this system while many of us bear its social and environmental costs. Increasingly, we lack connection to our food. Relatively few people are engaged directly in producing or harvesting food and the majority of us are largely ignorant of the practices and processes by which food comes to our plate. Our food system could be very different, with significant benefits for all. We need the Scottish Government to:

- + Strengthen the powers of the planning system to ensure the vitality and diversity of town centres and safeguard land for growing food.
- + Invest in regional food economies connecting urban populations with rural producers – including community land ownership and community-connected agriculture.
- + Make prime spots available in town and city centres to facilitate farmers markets, drop-off points for buying groups and other models for supporting and facilitating short food chains.

Whilst we need Government to take a lead, everyone has a part to play in getting us from where we are now, to where we want to be. Individuals, producers, civil society, businesses and Government all need to act, and act with urgency and purpose. The change we need can be summarised as follows:

1. *Greater policy co-ordination and coherence*
2. *Government, its agencies and all public bodies to drive up standards, 'demonstrate by doing' and lead the way to better food systems*
3. *A more democratic and inclusive food system*
4. *A new 'sustainable development' approach throughout the food chain*
5. *People with the knowledge and resources (financial and otherwise) to make good food choices*
6. *To lead the way and learn from best practice, beyond our borders*

To drive all this forward we are calling for primary legislation that, amongst other requirements, enshrines the Right to Food in Scottish law, promotes agroecology as the farming method of the future, and creates a statutory Food Commission. This Commission would provide oversight and scrutiny of our food system and report on it annually to Parliament. It would be obliged to consult with civil society, and be able to commission research, issue advice and work with all relevant agencies to assist in the transition to a better food system.

Our aim in writing this report is to make the case for change and encourage debate on this important subject. We look forward to dialogue with others going forward.



Gambian Scotch Egg, The Empire Cafe, 2014.
Photo by Clem Sandison.

“People have become accustomed to the use of a minimum diet for the maintenance of life in calculating the cost of living, and it is well-known that people can be kept alive for varying periods on diets with varying degrees of deficiency. The level of the standard adopted here – the optimum – is not just to provide a diet which will keep people alive, but a diet which will keep people in health; and the standard of health adopted is a state of well-being such that no improvement could be effected by a change in the diet.”

John Boyd Orr (1936), *Food Health and Income*, Rowett Research Institute.