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Dear Professor Brennan

Thank you for your letter of 21 June requesting that I bring forward the Good Food Nation legislation before the end of this Parliament.

We remain committed to delivery of the Good Food Nation ambition and so I am pleased to see the continued high level of interest in this subject.

You will be aware that the consultation on Good Food Nation Proposals for Legislation closed on 18 April 2019. We intend to publish a formal analysis of the consultation responses shortly. Once we have examined the analysis, we will consider and agree the next steps.

You raise a number of points in your letter, one of which is the question of the right to food. You might be aware that Shirley Anne Somerville, Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People, and Professor Alan Miller of Strathclyde University are to co-chair a National Taskforce for Human Rights Leadership. The purpose of the taskforce is to ensure Scotland is a world leader in putting human rights into practice. The taskforce will focus on the development of new legislation which would enhance the protection of the human rights of every member of Scottish society. The new taskforce will oversee wider work to deliver a radical blueprint for human rights legislation covering all areas of devolved responsibility.

I can assure you of the importance which Ministers attach to realising economic, social, cultural and environmental human rights, including the right to food. Work in this area supports the Government's commitment to strengthening human rights in Scotland.

Your letter also usefully recognises wider challenges, such as the fact that many jobs in the food sector are insecure and poorly paid. This too is an obvious human rights challenge and has strong links to the Scottish Government's Fair Work agenda and the National Performance Framework.

We are also taking action to tackle poverty which is the main driver of household food insecurity in Scotland. We continue to challenge the UK Government's punitive welfare reforms. We also promote the living wage, and take a rights-based approach to the design and delivery of Scotland's social security system. Our £3.5 million Fair Food Fund is underpinned by a set of Dignity Principles developed by an Independent Working Group on Food Poverty, and is supporting people to access nutritious food and help to tackle the causes of poverty.

We have set targets to eradicate child poverty in statute, setting four income based targets to be met by 2030, and interim targets to be met by 2023. Our first Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan sets out concrete action to increase household incomes, and reduce costs, backed by a multi-million pound package of investment.

Over the last year we have introduced a new Best Start Grant, a Financial Health Check Service and increased School Clothing Grants. By the end of 2022 our new Scottish Child Payment, worth £10 a week, will be available for all eligible children under 16, and we'll deliver early payments for under 6's before the end of this Parliament.

Our plan includes world-leading proposals to tackle junk food promotions and the marketing of unhealthy food, which are more likely to be consumed by children. We want to create a food environment that makes it easier for families to make healthier choices and develop good food habits. We are currently considering all responses to the consultation on restricting the promotion and marketing of foods with little or no nutritional benefit. We want to remove triggers that encourage overconsumption and impulse purchases.

We know people living in poverty have poorer health outcomes. When it comes to overweight and obesity, it is not acceptable that significant inequalities exist between our most and least deprived communities. Our actions on public health are complemented by wide-ranging action to address the root causes of poverty and inequality.

The Scottish Government supports access to affordable, healthy and sustainable food for all. We acknowledge that in the current economic climate of welfare reform and increasing food prices this can be a concern for many people. We are committed to tackling inequality and improving food access is a big part of that work.

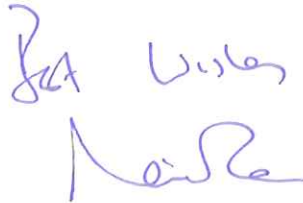
You may also wish to note that I recently launched Good Food Futures. This food education programme will provide a strong message about what are we doing to promote Scotland's food and drink and ensure children and young people grow up knowing more about where their food comes from, understanding about healthy food, and thinking about future careers in the food and drink industry. At the heart of it all is delivery of the Good Food Nation agenda.

You may also be aware that the Scottish Government has established a Farming and Food Production Working Group, which will support Government in developing long-term policy and delivery options that deliver positive outcomes for rural Scotland. In doing so, we are delivering an approach which involves producers, consumers and environmental organisations. The group will focus on the period beyond 2024 and will test proposals to support farming and food production as a key part of a flourishing rural Scotland, including the impact on climate change, the loss of biodiversity and the need to maintain the rural population. The group will make recommendations to government in the course of 2020.

We have recently acknowledged the climate emergency. The Scottish Government firmly believe that our agricultural industry including our livestock sector has an important role to play as part of the solution to climate change. We understand that a fine balance must therefore be found to ensure the essential greenhouse gas reductions can take place while Scotland continues to produce secure and sustainable food. Our industry has a very positive track record both environmentally and as world-leaders in quality assurance and the priority we give to animal welfare.

With regard to animal welfare, we take this very seriously and policies and legislation on animal welfare are constantly being reviewed and updated in light of new information on best practice. Farm animal welfare rules are increasingly set at an EU level, and the last decade has seen some significant progress, with EU-wide improvements to welfare rules on farms and during transport and at slaughter. Examples include the banning of barren cages for laying hens, the banning of sow stalls, the introduction of environmental enrichment requirements for pigs, and training and licencing requirements for animal handlers at slaughter. These are rigorously enforced in Scotland and the rest of the UK.

I hope this reassures you about the amount of current work ongoing, or planned across Scottish Government that contributes to the Good Food Nation agenda.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Nicola Sturgeon', is positioned above the printed name.

NICOLA STURGEON