

What does it mean to be a Good Food Nation?

Right now, food is at the heart of some of Scotland's biggest challenges, from inequality to ill health to ecological damage. We have a food system of injustice: many people are priced out of a decent diet, reliant on foodbanks and suffering the consequences of poor nutrition. Big business makes healthy profits, but we do not value the people who work to produce and process food, the farm animals, or the wildlife and natural resources, which enable us to eat well. We need a just transition to a food system founded on the principles of social and environmental justice.

A Good Food Nation Bill is going to be introduced in the Scottish Parliament to address these challenges, so what would a Good Food Nation look like?

For the Scottish Food Coalition, becoming a Good Food Nation means:

1. All food is good food: our food production is fair to people, animals and the planet

Food is good for nature. Farming and fishing businesses are doing their part to support wildlife, to prevent air and water pollution, to help mitigate climate change, and to protect soils and seas.

Food is good for animals. Farm animals live well and die well - conditions on farms promote healthy and happy lives, while the transport and slaughter of animals protect against avoidable pain and suffering.

Food is good to people. Farmers, crofters, fishermen and food workers have safe and fair working conditions and earn at least the living wage. No one is exploited in food production and processing, either at home or abroad.

Food is safe and supports good health. We minimise the use of pesticides, antibiotics and other chemicals in food production, and make nutrition a priority in food production and processing.

The Good Food Nation Bill must protect people, the environment, and animals from harm.

2. Food is at the heart of healthy lives: universal access to high quality, nutritious & sustainable food

There is no need for food banks. Fresh, nutritious food is readily available and affordable for everyone.

Healthy and sustainable food is the easy choice. The food offer in shops, cafes and restaurants means that healthy food is the most accessible and affordable and valued by all.

Food in public kitchens is leading the way. Schools, hospitals, care homes, and local and national government buildings lead by example serving tasty, healthy food that is good for nature.

We share more food. Food plays a part in fun and creative communities, with markets and meals bringing people together.

The Good Food Nation Bill must ensure the benefits of good food are enjoyed by people equally, and change the context within which food choices are made.

3. Food is empowering: we know more, grow more and have a bigger say in our food system

We know more about food. Food education in school and beyond equips everyone with basic skills and information regarding growing, cooking, nutrition and sustainability. Our supply chains are transparent and research about food is held to high standards.

Everyone can get involved in growing food. Land and growing spaces, as well as training and support, are available for those who want to produce food sustainably - whether on a small allotment, or to earn a living.

We all have a say. Everyone has opportunities to get involved in decisions around food, and influence the rules that affect the food we eat.

The Good Food Nation Bill must give us all more power in our food system.

How can we create a Good Food Nation?

Legislation can play a crucial role in setting the direction of travel towards a fair, healthy and sustainable food system. Establishing the core purpose of the food system in law, with accompanying systems of governance that ensure progress and accountability can catalyse a transformation in how our food system works. By taking a whole system approach, the Good Food Nation Bill creates a coherent framework that ensures people's fundamental human rights and the integrity of our ecological home are promoted today and into the future.

The Scottish Food Coalition believes the Good Food Nation Bill must include five core mechanisms.

1. Incorporate the right to food in Scots law

We all have a right to food in international law, but without protection in Scottish law these rights can't shape policy or practice, and can't be enforced in Scotland. We all have a right to be able to eat well, and to a food system that treats people and planet fairly. This means food should be accessible to people both financially and geographically, food should be adequate in terms of its nutritional content, safety, and cultural appropriateness, and food should be available by way of resources, infrastructure and a healthy environment that enables people to produce food now and into the future. This is not yet a reality in Scotland, we need a legal framework to respect, protect, and fulfil food rights.

2. An Independent Statutory Body

The food system touches on a wide range of issues across several cabinet portfolios, to become a Good Food Nation will require more than words on paper. Establishing (or giving authority to) an independent body to ensure the implementation of this agenda is crucial. A Statutory Food Commission would provide expertise on realising the right to food, scrutinise relevant policies, report on the state of the food system, and ensure coherence across Government. It would facilitate public participation in food policy and be charged with overseeing a democratic and rights-based approach to food.

3. Cross-cutting National Food Plans

Currently food policy is fragmented, with different Government departments creating separate and sometimes contradictory strategies according to diverse policy goals. This prohibits clear leadership, which businesses and communities can respond to. A requirement that every five years the Scottish Ministers consult on and collectively agree a plan for food, farming and fishing in Scotland would ensure effective action through strategic joined-up policy making. A National Food Plan would be grounded in the right to food, include targets on specific issues, and link to the National Performance Framework and Sustainable Development Goals.

4. Duties on public bodies

The success of becoming a Good Food Nation will depend on the engagement and coordination of all levels of Government, as well as the inclusion of unions and communities in developing strategies. Duties on local authorities, health boards and other public bodies to adhere to the right to food framework and incorporate the priorities established in the National Food Plan into their strategic decision-making and service provision ensures all available levers are used to support this transformation.

5. Sectoral measures and targets

In addition to defining the purpose of our food system and creating a new system of governance for it, the Good Food Nation Bill should include specific programmatic measures and statutory targets to stimulate immediate action on some of the challenges. This could include targets such as an x% reduction in household food insecurity; x% reduction in adult and childhood obesity; x% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from the food system; x% of food and drink businesses paying the living wage; x% reduction in routine preventative antibiotic use on livestock; and others – aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals.