

## OUR COMMON WEALTH OF FOOD

# Nourish Conference 2014 – Report



“ We have forgotten that we should not just be keeping people alive, but we should also be *nourishing* them. We need to rebuild local food systems in the Global North and the Global South, reconnecting local farmers to local consumers, and rural areas to cities. ”

Olivier de Schutter,  
former UN special rapporteur  
on the Right to Food

## Our Common Wealth of Food

In the year of the Commonwealth Games, Nourish Scotland's annual conference focused on how we can create a food system that feeds people well in Scotland and does no harm internationally.

Around 200 people, from various organisations (including academics, food producers, policy makers, activists and people from civil society) gathered at the two-day conference in Glasgow on 16 – 17 October.

## What was the conference all about?

Every time we eat or shop, we're part of a global food system that, in terms of people, money and impact on the planet, is bigger than any other human system.



At the conference, we wanted to explore this system together so that we could then think clearly about the way forward for Scotland. Taking the first steps towards an ethical food policy for Scotland was one of our aims.

To do this we got the 'whole system in the room', from farmers' leaders from the Global South (Caribbean, Malawi, Trinidad, India) to people working at the sharp end of 'first world hunger'; from climate change and agricultural scientists to people working on grow your own projects; from people working to create sustainable food cities to farmers and land managers.

The format of the conference included presentations, panel discussions, Q&As from the floor, workshops, and a stall and exhibition space.

# Key messages from speakers and panel discussions – Day 1



We had the honour to have **Olivier de Schutter**, outgoing UN special rapporteur on the Right to Food, open the conference via a [video message](#). He gave a broad overview of the characteristics of the global food system and its impacts on social and environmental justice. He said that the costs of the food system, which was set up in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, have become fully visible now. These costs include reduced biodiversity, reduced soil fertility and climate change.

The lack of government support for small farms results in them losing access to markets, and consequently in a massive depopulation of rural regions. The system also has an impact on health. The production of cheap calories is prioritised and the links between agriculture, food and health are forgotten. We have forgotten that we should not just be keeping people alive, but we should also be *nourishing* them.

De Schutter summarised the obstacles to reforming the food system as follows: the technology and infrastructure developed for and by big agro-industry; a social, economic and political system in which a small number of increasingly powerful actors dominate the system and block change; and a food culture with strong dependence on highly processed foods.

Olivier de Schutter suggested three priority areas for action that were a helpful guiding frame for the rest of the conference. 1) We need to address the interdependence between the lifestyles in the Global North and the reforms needed in the Global South. Current ways of consuming and importing food in the north make reform in the south very difficult. 2) We need to rebuild local food systems in the north and the south, reconnecting local farmers to local consumers, and rural areas to cities.

And 3) we need to democratise food systems ensuring greater accountability and transparency in decision-making on food and agriculture.

De Schutter was followed by **Pete Smith**, co-author of the IPCC climate change report, University of Aberdeen, who said we need to change not only our farming practices but also our dietary habits. If everyone in the world ate healthily, we could cut greenhouse gas emissions by one third.

**Frank Strang** from the Scottish Government told us about the successes of the Scottish food industry. However, he also acknowledged the blind spots of the government's policy related to food. A new food policy under the title '[Becoming a Good Food Nation](#)' aims to address those blind spots, including the setting up of a national Food Commission.

The introductory session was followed by the **Agrichat panel** during which farmers' leaders from across the Commonwealth talked about the situation in their country with regards to climate change, land access, global markets and making a living from farming. **Krishan Bir Chaudhary** (Indian Farmers' Society) told us that in India most farmers have less than one hectare of land. 36% of agricultural land is irrigated and the groundwater level is going down in every state in India. In addition, climate change affects the monsoon and thus food security. Concerning GM (genetic modification) he said, technology should be farmer-friendly, environment-friendly and animal-friendly, and GM is none of these things. Morally, governments should support the farming community to guarantee food security and fulfill their commitments to society. **Audrey Walters-Butler** (Caribbean Farmers Network) told us that in her country severe flooding caused deaths, that people lost crops and animals, and that GM is a subject of ongoing concern

and discussion in the Caribbean. **Philip Chidawati** (Malawi Milk Producers Association) said that Malawi has a small but growing dairy sector. Most dairy farmers have one or two cows per farm, producing 6-8 litres per day. He said that climate change has affected production and contributes to land degradation and deforestation. Chemical fertilisers are worsening the effects of climate change he said. There are no GM crops grown in Malawi at the moment, because farmers have been resisting it. But people might be consuming them in imported food. He emphasized the importance of domestic food production for the domestic economy. **Nigel Miller** (National Farmers Union Scotland) told us that 40-60% of Scottish produce is exported and that farming is the most political industry in the world. He said that the weather is getting wetter and that besides flooding there is also an increase in certain diseases, including bluetongue. In Nigel Miller's opinion, GM technology is just a technology; it's how we use it that matters. You can breed a potato to be

more resistant to disease over 20 years, or you can do it quickly with GM, which seems like an intelligent option. **John MacKintosh** (crofter) said most crofters keep cattle and sheep, and grow some vegetables too. They often have a bit of land of their own, plus access to common land. He is worried about GM shrinking the gene pool. What is important for the future of farming is that food producers understand soil and that people understand what food is all about.

The next topic discussed was **First World Hunger**. The sharp increase of food banks particularly in the UK and Scotland proves that hunger is not only an issue in the so called 'developing countries' but a shameful sign of rich western societies becoming increasingly unequal. Maybe 10-15% of households in Scotland are food insecure – not sure whether they will be able to get through the week with enough to eat for everyone. Thousands of Scots have to rely on food banks – yet Scotland is a significant food exporter.

**Graham Riches** from Canada, a leading authority on ‘first world hunger’, said that charities, in the form of food banks, cannot provide the solution to food poverty. Governments need to take responsibility and integrate the Right to Food into domestic law. At the same time, we need to take a serious look at our economic model and its neoliberal mantra. Thus, the conversation needs to change from ‘food poverty’ to ‘the right to food’, Graham Riches said. **Martin Johnston** (Faith in Community) said that food poverty is not an issue of charity but an issue of justice. The people using food banks need to be around the table when solutions are being developed. **Terri Ballard** (UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)) told us about the importance of measuring food insecurity so we can monitor progress in tackling it. FAO has developed a global measure of food insecurity called the **Food Insecurity Experience Scale** (FIES). Information derived from the FIES is comparable across different geographic areas and cultures, making national, regional and global monitoring of food insecurity possible. It can be used to

improve our understanding of the causes of food insecurity.

Before we broke for lunch **Michael Northcott** (Professor of Ethics, University of Edinburgh) shared historical perspectives on how to look at ethics with regard to food policy.

After lunch we had speakers exploring aspects of **a people-centred food system**. A food system that values producers, improves nutrition, tackles gender inequalities and slows climate change. **Rucha Chitnis** (**Women’s Earth Alliance**, WEA) said that while women grow the majority of the food in the Global South, most of them are not recognised as farmers and do not hold land titles. They also struggle to access information, training and appropriate technologies to improve their food security. WEA works for the democratisation of knowledge and invests in women’s leadership; they link women with the resources, training, funding, and partnerships they need to build

self-reliant, environmentally sustainable, and healthy communities. **Sue Dibb’s Eating Better Alliance** works for a cultural shift towards eating less and better meat. Our consumption of meat in the UK is double the global average per capita. We need to talk about meat if we are serious about improving health, food security, animal welfare, justice, environmental protection and providing sustainable livelihoods. According to a survey, 1 in 3 people are willing to consider eating less meat, and half of the people would be willing to pay more for ‘better’ meat. **Jamie Livingstone** (Oxfam Scotland) told us that around 820,000 people in Scotland live in poverty and that the 66 richest people own the same wealth as the 3.5 billion poorest people. To reduce poverty and establish more equality, we need to reclaim our economy: creating better work, fairer taxation and empowered communities. It’s not enough to provide people with food, what they need instead are the means and livelihood opportunities that allow them to look after themselves.



After these speakers all conference delegates split up into several groups in order to discuss sustainable nutrition, resilient production and a vibrant food culture.

Food sovereignty, the right to food and the role of human-scale farming in achieving food justice were the topics of the evening panel discussion, chaired by Ruth Wishart. Wilma Finlay (Cream O’Galloway) said it’s

not so much about how big the farm is but whether it benefits society and helps feed the world. In India, small farms protect the food security of a large population, Krishan Bir Chaudhary (Indian Farmers Society)



# Key messages from speakers and panel discussions – Day 2



The second day was opened by **Pete Ritchie** (Nourish), and **Patrick Harvie MSP** (Greens) speaking about food policy in Scotland. Pete Ritchie highlighted three themes from the first day – dignity, resilience and trust – and argued that among all the violence of inequality, the loss of half of the world’s wildlife and the destruction of soil there were the beginnings of change towards a food system which was about people and planet. Patrick Harvie and the Greens want to see the current economic model replaced by a decentralised economy which reflects what our real needs are. This would not exclude exports, but they would not show up as GDP but rather as the relationships we have with others. The Greens will have a position on food in their next party manifesto. The following session was specifically about the **right to food**.

**Deirdre Flanigan** (Scottish Human Rights Commission) explained that the UK has signed the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and this obliges the UK to ensure the supply of adequate food for its citizens. The Commission is exploring more specific models of incorporating the right to food into Scottish law.

**Patrick Mulvany** (Food Ethics Council) focused on seeds. He explained that realising farmer’s rights to save, exchange and sell seeds is an important part of realising the right to food.

In the session on **access to markets** global trade rules were demystified and we learned what access to markets means for farmers at home and abroad. **Nick Dearden** (Global Justice) explained how global mechanisms

such as IMF, WTO, TTIP and the New Alliance for Food Security cause food insecurity. The New Alliance for Food Security for example is a partnership between Western governments, African governments and corporations. Western governments promise aid, corporations promise to invest, and African governments promise to change policies to make it easier for corporations to access land, seed laws, etc. Our challenge is to counter the narrative and uncover the myths that allow these policies to be introduced in the first place. **Moir Samson** who manages the family farm Muddy Boots in Fife, Scotland painted a very vivid picture of the number of structural changes the farm underwent in her lifetime and how much commitment and resourcefulness is required to keep the business running. Whilst her father made a big effort to adapt to market forces and succeeded in selling his produce

to supermarkets, Moira is now running a diversified farm business selling everything direct from the farm in order to be able to make a living from it. **Martin Rhodes** (Scottish Fair Trade Forum) said that our common humanity is not reflected in world trade and that an emphasis on fair imports needs to become a reality if Scotland wants to call itself a sustainable food nation. **John Riches** (Just Trading Scotland) explained that the support farmers in the Global South need is training, also on developing crops suitable for export. For example, the rice the farmers in Malawi grow is okay for domestic use, but to be accepted by foreign caterers and supermarkets, a different quality standard needs to be reached. It is crucial to find the right message in order to engage people in Scotland. For example, Just Trading Scotland explains to schools that buying 90kg of rice allows a grower to send their children to school for 1 year.

In the session on **access to land** we heard about the latest on land reform in Scotland, and the challenge for small farmers globally.

**Ian Cooke** (Development Trusts Association Scotland) said that there is strong political support for the recommendations in the land reform review's group report carrying the promising title '**The land of Scotland and the Common Good**'. One of the recommendations is that future policy on land should be based on public interest and common good.

**Glen Ramjag** (Food Crop Farmers Association) spoke about the historical development of land ownership in Trinidad and how people got land in colonial times. What's needed today is a legal framework for accessing land, and a register to record the transfer of properties. They also lack proper planning and environmental regulations for managing their land.

The very last talk was given by **Alyn Smith** (SNP, Member of the European Parliament) putting an ethical food policy in an EU and international context. He expressed his concern over the process and content of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Programme (TTIP), calling it an affront to

democracy and people. He asked: "who are these people who negotiated it, whom do they represent, and whom did they get the mandate from"?

In conclusion he said that that Scotland cannot feed the world but that we can lead by example. He stated that he was looking forward to a list of action points as an outcome from this conference that he can put forward to the minister.

Finally, after lunch we were interested to hear input from our delegates on how we could work **towards an ethical food policy in Scotland**. We did this in eight groups, each looking into a specific aspect of food policy. Each group was asked to agree on a principle formulated in one sentence which started as "In a just society ...", and to list three strategic actions needed to realise the principle. At the end the groups reconvened to share with everybody their ideas for an ethical food policy and how to take this forward in policy and action (see below).

# Towards an ethical food policy for Scotland

## – Principles and strategic actions



<b>The right to food</b>	<p><b>In a just society</b> the state has ultimate responsibility for ensuring that everyone has access, reliably and with dignity, to sufficient, nutritious food that is culturally appropriate.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A minimum income as part of the welfare and tax system to ensure this. (And as an immediate action resist current welfare reforms and proposals for card based benefits)</li> <li>2. The right to food to be enshrined in UK and Scottish law.</li> <li>3. Start campaigns that emphasise the right to food and channel people's concerns away from food banks.</li> </ol>
<b>Control of the food system</b>	<p><b>In a just society</b> local control of all parts of the food system is maximised and corporate control minimised.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Scottish Government (SG) promotion – and subsidies to support – a decentralised and community owned food system and a food commission with teeth.</li> <li>2. A coordinated and popular campaign against TTIP. Cross party and publicly stated opposition to TTIP.</li> <li>3. Curbs on supermarkets, including a living wage, a new model of food distribution, planning restrictions on numbers of supermarkets and land value tax.</li> </ol>
<b>Access to the means of production</b>	<p><b>In a just society</b> we have access to the land, capital and other resources that we need to feed our communities well.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. SG to take all publicly owned/managed/administered land into community stewardship or management to actively encourage small-scale production, underpinned by education.</li> <li>2. SG to protect the core components of our production systems by ensuring our water, soil and other systems remain unpolluted (e.g. by fracking) and by specifying minimum nutritional standards for staples such as flour to promote our health and wellbeing.</li> <li>3. SG to provide the infrastructure necessary to allow effective local food production systems (e.g. processing facilities such as abattoirs and mills, covered markets, transport hubs etc.).</li> </ol>

Fair consumption	<p><b>In a just society</b> the food choices we make do not have a negative impact on anyone or anything. All food products for purchase have been produced and traded ethically.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We should be learning life-long on the nature and impacts of the food system. What is the basic food basket that is sufficient for health, ecologically and environmentally sound, and reflects the true costs of food production?</li> <li>2. We have public and community sector champions of sustainable food procurement so that any food available through schools, hospitals and other public outlets is healthy and environmental friendly.</li> <li>3. Taxation, trading and pricing mechanisms are designed to reward primary producers of healthy, sustainable food and discourage the converse.</li> </ol>
Fair trade	<p><b>In a just society</b> all our trade is fair and sustainable. All suppliers – domestic and international – get a fair deal. People receive a fair return on labour and investment, with a reasonable expectation of stability so they can plan and invest.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. SG to change the way business is done through regulations, incentives and taxes for business and procurers, and minimum standards of acceptable practice.</li> <li>2. Make it human. Use pump priming and public funds to support visits to farms, community-to-community trade, co-operation and mentoring, making better connections between people and communities internationally and allowing more people to grow their own.</li> <li>3. Partnership – build alliances across community between councils, NHS, businesses to do business fairer, e.g. sustainable food city partnerships</li> </ol>
Animal welfare	<p><b>In a just society</b> animals are treated as living creatures not industrial units.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reduce meat and dairy consumption to allow space for less intensive, cruel livestock systems. This would require legislation on intensive systems.</li> <li>2. Redesign supply systems to bring communities and farmers into closer relationships to ensure affordability and better animal welfare.</li> <li>3. Redesign policy and subsidy systems to prioritise support for smaller scale livestock farming (in which farmers know their animals).</li> </ol>
Climate change	<p><b>In a just society</b> we take responsibility and action for climate change impact while providing fair access to food and full means of production.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create a system for full cost accounting across social, economic and environment factors at home and abroad.</li> <li>2. Meat free day for all institutions across Scotland.</li> <li>3. Fast track to access land rights for communities.</li> </ol>
Biodiversity	<p><b>In a just society</b> our environment is used in the context of stewardship for the common good of all species in perpetuity, recognising interdependence.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Enshrine in law the responsibilities that come with land use and land management whilst ensuring conservation and improvement for future generations.</li> <li>2. Use financial tools to support resilient, diverse production systems.</li> </ol>

# A big thanks to everyone...

The team at Nourish would like to thank everyone who contributed to making this event a real success: all our speakers and workshop leaders from near and far. We are especially grateful to those who undertook long journeys from India, the Caribbean, Trinidad, Malawi, Canada and Italy, but also to Rucha Chitnis from the Woman's Earth Alliance, who joined us via Skype, and Olivier de Schutter, outgoing UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, who sent us an incredibly inspiring video message.

We would also like to thank the exhibitors and stall holders for their topical information and

delicious produce they shared with delegates. The conference stalls area created a great interactive setting for the enthusiastic networking and socialising that happened during break times.

For the effort in sourcing organic, local and ethically traded food we would like to thank the concert hall's catering team from Encore. Delegates were able to forage on mouthwatering artisan bread and cheese provided by Bread Matters and Cream O'Galloway, as well as from the ever-filled bowls of sweet, crunchy apples from the Falkland Estate.

The evening dinner was a really atmospheric celebration thanks to inspiring poetry from Rachel Amey & Rachel McCrum and the lively vibes of the Robert Fish Band.

Thanks to Albi Taylor and her team for their tireless effort in capturing all the important things that were said in fantastic graphics.

Last but not least, a very big thanks to all volunteers and delegates for their enthusiasm, energy and ideas, all crucial in making the conference a real catalyst for collective action towards an ethical food system in Scotland.

## Go to our website...

... to find presentations, Olivier de Schutter's video message, photographs and the amazing graphics that document all that happened throughout the two days.

If you are you inspired by what Nourish is doing and want to support our work towards realising an ethical food policy for Scotland please consider **becoming a member**.

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