

Nourish Scotland contribution to Fairer Scotland - National Conversation,
Dec 2015

Introduction

For us at Nourish Scotland, a crucial part of a Fairer Scotland is a fairer food system: for our families, our farmers, our workers and our planet. We want to see a transformation in how we grow, make, eat and access our food.

We believe that everyone has the right to sufficient, safe, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food. Food is more than calories, profit margins and quotas: our food system and our food culture surrounding it could, and should, enhance our environment and people's lives. We believe that our farmers, producers and people who work with food have a right to a fair wage and to be treated with dignity and respect. And we believe that it is possible to produce our food while looking after our environment and promoting animal welfare.

In this introduction we briefly present two important frames for achieving a fairer food system; the **Sustainable Food Cities Network** and a **human rights based approach**. In the sections that follow we outline how food comes into different focus areas of the Fairer Scotland consultation - the issues at stake and what we think needs to be done to address these. We also argue that food production should be considered through the lens of fairness.

One of the biggest barriers to a fairer, more sustainable and resilient food system in Scotland is a lack of policy coherence in food issues in Scotland. Food is scattered across a myriad of portfolios, from voluntary sector to public health, food and drink, environment, research, tourism and economic development and communities. There is currently very little connection between the food that we are advised to eat, the food that we grow and the ecosystems that it is produced in, the development of the local food economy and the role our community sector can play in developing our food skills and knowledge and sharing our cultural traditions around food. There are few national outcomes that relate directly to food. We need to measure progress across our whole food system, rather than use the current fragmented system, which results in us simultaneously celebrating the success of our food exports while bemoaning our poor diet and increased reliance on food banks, We need to do more to value our food and the contribution it can make to a huge number of policy portfolios and outcomes.

One way in which we can work together to create a more consistent approach to food at a local authority level is to recognise the efforts of the **Sustainable Food Cities Network**. This UK wide network supports a more holistic approach to food issues. Edinburgh and Glasgow are both members of this network and both cities host food partnerships. These strategic partnerships, comprising representatives of the third sector, businesses, local authorities, and health and education services aim to join up food policy at a local level for more consistent policy and practice and to generate added value from the activities of partners.

Another way of embedding fairness and policy coherence in to the food system is to enshrine a **human rights based approach** into Scots Law. This could be done directly through incorporation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, or indirectly through, for example, a Food, Farming and Health Act. A human rights based approach to food as understood in international law centres on the principles of accessibility, availability, and adequacy and sustainability. Accessibility means financial and geographical access to food without having to compromise on other basic needs, for example household energy. Availability means that food can be grown or reared on land and sea, and that markets for purchase are available. Adequacy means that food must satisfy dietary and cultural needs, food must be safe for consumption and free from adverse substances. Sustainability means that food will be accessible for current and future generations. A human rights based approach integrates these considerations in to decision making ensuring policy and law strikes a fair balance in the allocation of resources, with a view to creating the framework for a basic floor of access to all citizens.

The full realisation of a right to food requires an understanding of the way we access food at the moment and policy to address any shortfalls. Whilst we do monitor some aspects of our relationship with food, for example dietary health, one important area in which there is a knowledge gap is food insecurity. Food insecurity, or food poverty, includes people who do not know whether they will have enough food, compromise on food quality or quantity, reduce quantity or skip meals, or are experiencing hunger. We have some indication of the growing nature of food insecurity reflected in the increasing number of food bank parcels the Trussell Trust provide.¹ However, it is important to remember that even the 117,689 parcels provided in 2014/15 does not reflect the people who use other emergency food providers, or people who cannot or do not feel able to access a food bank.

¹ Trussell Trust, Foodbank Statistics with Regional Breakdown 1st April 2014 – 31 March 2015 (2015) <http://www.trusselltrust.org/stats>

Whilst acknowledging the important support that charitable food provision to people experiencing crisis provides, Nourish believes that in a fairer Scotland we should have access by right, with dignity and choice. As discussed below there are a number of alternative models for emergency food provision such as community-led food hubs that can deliver this.

Nourish notes with regret that food insecurity appears to be a growing problem, attributable largely to low wages and reforms of social security benefits – especially conditionality and delay. We are deeply concerned at the disproportionate impact this has had on the most vulnerable people in our society financially accessing food. We are hopeful that through this wide Fairer Scotland engagement, together with the recommendations of the Short Life Working Group chaired by Rev Dr Martin Johnstone and the new powers devolved through the Smith Commission, that Scotland can become a leader in the reduction of poverty and inequality throughout and beyond the food system.

What are the issues that matter most to you and what needs to be done?

Health

Inequality and poverty are manifested through food into health inequalities.

The issues:

- *Our levels of diet-related ill health and obesity continue to rise* (incl. diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular diseases)
- *Our progress in meeting our national dietary goals (eating more fibre and fruit and vegetables and less sugar, salt and saturated fats) remains extremely poor*
- *Poverty greatly impacts people's ability to feed themselves and their families well:*
Today a healthy diet is financially inaccessible for many in Scotland. A recent UK study found that on average healthy foods are approximately three times more expensive than less healthy foods per calorie². Unable to afford healthy foods – or the fuel to cook them – low-income households consume more highly-processed foods high in sugar, fat and salt, which also tend to be marketed towards such groups³. Health inequalities are marking ever-deepening lines through Scottish society.

What needs to be done:

The Government's focus has been disproportionately on the individual, and changing individual choices and behaviours through public education and campaigns – but for people to start to make different food choices, we need to create a material and social environment to enable and support these choices (taking the ISM framework as a starting point). The government spends huge amounts on dealing with the consequences of poor health; preventative measures focused on helping the Scottish population to eat better would be money well spent.

To promote a food system that reduces health inequalities, the Scottish Government could:

- Lead by example with all food served in the public sector meeting the healthy eating aims set out for our national diet and sustainably sourced
- Support training and development for people working with food and stimulate new food based start-ups, especially ones that deliver sustainably produced, healthy food.

² NRV Jones et al, The Growing Price Gap between More and Less Healthy Foods: Analysis of a Novel Longitudinal UK Dataset (2014) <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0109343>

³ V Press, Why consider what people eat?, Nutrition and food poverty: A toolkit, Faculty of Public Health (2004) <http://www.fph.org.uk/uploads/prelims.pdf>

- Extend the healthy start voucher scheme to subsidise fruit and vegetables for all low-income families.
- Support primary care teams to form an integral part of improving public nutrition, just as they have helped to reduce smoking.
- Support a network of well-trained community growing advisors. These advisors could work to implement the local authority's 'food growing strategy' (which must be developed under the Community Empowerment Act) to double urban production of fruit and vegetables.
- Exempt fresh fruit and vegetable shops on the high street from business rates, providing training for staff to work as informal providers of nutritional advice and encouragement.
- Exempt restaurants using predominantly local produce and serving healthy food from business rates.

Income & Employment

Low wages and uncertain working conditions reduce personal resilience to food insecurity. People working across the food and drink sector experience some of the lowest wages and uncertain conditions.

The issues:

- *In-work poverty and the growing number of people below the poverty line.*
In the period 2009-2015 the number of people living below the poverty line (below 60% of the average income after housing costs) has increased from 15% to 20%. People with incomes below the poverty line are highly likely to be food insecure.⁴
- *Jobs in the Food & Drink sector remain among the least well paid and most precarious.* Wages in all parts of the food system – agriculture, manufacturing, retail, and services – are below the UK average and the sector has a high proportion of zero hours contracts⁵.
- *Exploitation is rife in the food sector, particularly for migrant workers.*
Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in England and Scotland found that 'low-wage migrant workers appear especially vulnerable to forced labour, despite most of those interviewed having the right to live and work in the UK. The intensity of

⁴ Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Minimum Income Standards 2015 (2015) <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/minimum-income-standard-uk-2015>

⁵ Office for National Statistics, Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings - Retail wage based on 'Retail sale in non-specialised stores with food, beverages or tobacco predominating' only (2013) <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcm%3A77-328216>

work in the food industry, driven by economic pressures throughout the supply chain, contributes to such exploitation.⁶

- *Farmers – one of the most important jobs in society – are running at a loss.* With the price of produce mostly dictated by big supermarkets, without consideration of the costs of production, it is becoming extremely difficult to make a decent livelihood from farming in Scotland. To produce a four pint bottle of milk, it costs the farmer 62 pence; however they are only paid 48 pence by the retailers, who then sell the bottle for 94 pence. One in three of our farms would not be economic without receiving payments from EU subsidies under the Common Agricultural Policy.

What needs to be done:

- Increase the National Minimum Wage to the Living Wage, as independently calculated by the Living Wage Foundation using the Minimum Income Standard.
- Support local food producers: independent and community retailers employ three times as many people per unit of turnover as supermarkets⁷; localising our food system infrastructure is essential if we're serious about more and better jobs into the future.
- Use our public procurement purchasing power to support local, sustainable food producers and processors
- Invest in local infrastructure (processing, distribution and retail facilities) which will allow producers to add more value to what they produce, sell more locally and boost local jobs

People & Communities

Consistently eating alone is another indicator of the isolation many people experience.

The issues:

- Producing, preparing and consuming food have become very individualised activities in many areas of Scotland.
- Few of us have any connection to our food; we know very little about how it produced and where it comes from

What needs to be done:

⁶ Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Experiences of forced labour in UK Food Industry (2012)
<https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/experiences-forced-labour-uk-food-industry>

⁷ Campaign to Protect Rural England, From Field to Fork: That value of England's local food webs (2012)
<http://www.cpre.org.uk/resources/farming-and-food/local-foods/item/2897-from-field-to-fork>

- Community gardens, community cafes and other places where people can grow, prepare and share food, can play a big role in building community spirit and bridging social and cultural divides. Sustained investment in the community food and community growing sector is required.
- Embed food education into the curriculum, including access to hands on growing and cookery sessions
- Invest in short supply chains so that producers can sell more food locally, retain more value and interact with their customers and communities

Welfare

Social security related problems are now the single biggest trigger for foodbank referrals.⁸

Cuts to the social security budget, benefit conditionality (including the sanctions regime) and the lengthy delays in assessing and processing payments (particularly for people with disabilities) have left many people without any money for food whatsoever.

The issues:

- The benefit conditionality regime is tough and sanctions have been applied unfairly. DWP's own statistics revealed that 50% of sanctions appealed were successfully overturned, though the number of people appealing still remains relatively low.⁹ The imposition of a benefit sanction can last from between 4 weeks to 3 years, leaving a person without any money for food in this time. Not enough people who are eligible for the Scottish Welfare Fund and other emergency payments know about them, the process of application is too lengthy, and awards are relatively low.
- Welfare reform and delay has disproportionately impacted on the most vulnerable people in our society, notably women with children and people with disabilities.¹⁰
- Welfare payments are too low to guarantee access to good quality, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food.

What needs to be done:

- The Scottish Government will receive a number of new powers under the Scotland Act. We recommend exploring the option of developing a distinctively Scottish

⁸ See Trussel Trust figures (n1)

⁹ Department for Work and Pensions, JSA and ESA Sanctions: Decisions Made to March 2015 (2015) available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/jobseekers-allowance-and-employment-and-supportallowance-sanctions-decisions-made-to-march-2015>

¹⁰ For analysis see Nourish Scotland, Evidence to Pre-Sessional Working Group of UN CESCR (2015) here: <http://www.nourishscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/ICESCR-Nourish-Scotland-2015.pdf>

welfare system that provides an effective and dignified safety net for those in need, which is informed by and guarantees a minimum income level.

- The Scottish Government should also continue to work with local authorities and national advice providers to maximise take up of income maximisation measures

Equality

Inequality in our society is amplified across the food system.

The issues:

- *Rising levels of household food insecurity in Scotland.*
Food bank usage has increased dramatically over the past years while the prevalence of chronic food poverty is not even reflected in those numbers. Refugee families have been identified as being at greater risk of food poverty, along with people with disabilities, and low-income families (particularly single-parent women with young children).
- *Reliance on charitable approaches to food insecurity.*
So far the response to the growing prevalence of food poverty in Scotland has largely been to rely on the charitable provision of food aid. This approach, which depends on donations and food that would otherwise be wasted, not only has serious implications for the health of the recipients, but is also a transgression on principles of human dignity. The food is often insufficient and lacking in nutritional content, and people are denied autonomy over what they eat. The stigma associated with using a food bank means many of those most in need are reluctant to rely on this degrading system.
- *Unequal access to land*
There are a few individuals and families owning most of the land in Scotland. The inaccessibility of land has proved to be an insurmountable obstacle for many in Scotland with ambitions to farm. The Scottish Government must continue to push forward with reforms to land ownership and succession law. We join the calls of the Scottish Parliament's Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee for a genuinely radical reform that can deliver transformative change.
- *Global inequalities.*
Globally, most of the 795 million people who don't get enough to eat are, in fact, farmers.¹¹ Producing food for the international commodity market – e.g. to feed

¹¹ Thompson Reuters Foundation, Why are most of the world's hungry people farmers? (2015)
<http://www.trust.org/item/20150527174457-gt30a/>

people in Scotland – rather than focusing on self-sufficiency and local markets is a big part of the problem.

What needs to be done:

To reduce inequalities in access to good food, the Scottish Government could:

- Incorporate the Right to Food, as articulated in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which the UK is a signatory, into Scottish Law.
- Create the infrastructure to make the right to food a reality. Provide resources for community-led approaches that move away from the food bank model towards a more empowering, sustainable and healthy system for emergency food relief.
- In addition to investing in systems to provide emergency food relief, we should be investing in increasing the capacity and reach of our community food organisation and networks, to ensure that we invest in community learning and knowledge about cooking, food waste, budgeting and healthy eating. Some of this work, especially when networked with other agencies, has the capacity to deliver effective interventions before the need to access emergency food aid arises. For example this could see the creation of the national challenge fund for food hubs to work at a regional or local level, to connect and add value to the community food sector that goes on, by ensuring greater coverage of services, delivering synergies in area wide work, and piloting innovative solutions.
- Monitor the real level of food insecurity and develop policy solutions based on the findings.
- Build on its status as a Fair Trade Nation, and as a signatory to the UN Sustainable Development goals, to develop a ‘do no harm’ ethical food policy, which ensures that the food we import has been produced in ways that are socially and environmentally just, while guaranteeing this for the food that we export.
- Support new entrants in farming, especially those who want to produce healthy food for their local community; ensuring that everybody in Scotland can access land, training and development. Land reform is crucial here.
- Invest in regional food economies connecting urban populations with rural producers – including community land ownership and community-connected agriculture, as well as the urban food sector.

Children & Young People

Whilst adults often try to protect children from the impacts of food insecurity this is often not possible. Studies of food insecurity in other countries report that adults and children experience food insecurity similarly, including through quantitative and qualitative reduction of food, accompanying anxiety around having enough food, and social isolation and stigma from accessing food in non-conventional ways. Particularly important factors for children are certainty of food and involvement and choice in food decision-making.

The issues:

- Almost one third of those receiving emergency food aid are children.¹² 64% of children growing up in poverty live in a household where at least one parent works.¹³
- Poor nutrition in childhood has a long-lasting impact in terms of health and development; this is one of the contributing factors to a persistent attainment gap between pupils living in poverty and those who do not.¹⁴ In particular, adequate nutrition in the first 1000 days from conception have been identified as crucial for the long term health of a child.¹⁵

What needs to be done:

- Nuanced application of the Food Insecurity Experience Scale to children, with outcomes used to inform child-centred policies to prevent and address food insecurity.

Research suggests that methods of monitoring which focuses only on the adult(s) in a household is not fully representative of children because children will often respond with the view of protecting their carers when asked directly by them than when asked independently.¹⁶

- Universal access to adequate, nutritional and culturally appropriate food in schools.
- Training for primary service providers to notice food insecurity amongst children and to facilitate their carer's access to community food hubs and income maximisation advice, as well as collating information in the Early Warning System.¹⁷

¹² Trussell Trust, (n1)

¹³ Child Poverty Action Group, Child Poverty Facts and Figures (2015) <http://www.cpag.org.uk/child-poverty-facts-and-figures>

¹⁴ Scottish Government, Tackling Inequalities in the Early Years: Key messages from 10 years of the Growing up in Scotland study <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/10/7513/2>

¹⁵ 1,000 Days, The 2015 Global Nutrition Report shows progress is slow but possible (2015) <http://thousanddays.org/the-2015-global-nutrition-report-shows-progress-is-slow-but-possible/>

¹⁶ Contributions from E Frongillo in 'Research Opportunities Concerning the Causes and Consequences of Child Food Security and Hunger: A workshop summary' (2013) <http://www.nap.edu/read/18504/chapter/10>

¹⁷ Child Poverty Action Group, Early Warning System <http://www.cpag.org.uk/content/welcome-early-warning-system-newsletter-september-2015>

- Ensure child benefits are independently calculated by reference to the minimum needs of children and that payments are made for the benefit of all children in low income families. Exclude child benefits from any benefit cap.

Food production

A fairer food system takes care of the environment for future generations and protects and promotes farm animal welfare. Scottish Government already has strong targets with regards to biodiversity and greenhouse gas emission reduction; however, without transforming how we produce food, these targets will continue to be missed. Unchecked, human induced climate change will undermine our ability to feed ourselves and exacerbate social inequalities in access to food in the long term.

The issues:

- Agriculture and related land use accounts for 23.4% of Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions.
- Pesticide, herbicides and nitrates from our fertilisers are linked both to the degradation of our soil and the pollution of our water.
- Around two-thirds of farm animals globally are factory farmed, amounting to nearly 50 billion animals.

What needs to be done:

To make the way we produce food in Scotland greener and fairer the Scottish government could:

- Commit Scotland to a becoming a leader in developing a more sustainable approach to agriculture. We should focus on developing relevant education, training, advice and research and in ensuring knowledge transfer and the take-up of best practice.
- Set an ambitious target for increasing the area of land managed organically – 10% by 2020.
- Campaign for total Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform. Any reform should ensure that public money is spent on public goods such as stewardship, access and ecosystem services, rather than simply income support. In the meantime, we should ensure better use of public funds (through the SRDP) for support of sustainable farming approaches
- Provide financial incentives to produce the components of a more sustainable diet, which would reduce meat consumption and boost dietary levels of fibre, fruit and vegetables. For example, we could exempt vegetarian and vegan meals from VAT.

What role can you play

Nourish is an NGO campaigning for a fairer food system. We seek to empower communities to take control of the challenges they experience through the food system. We believe that many of the challenges presented require strong complementary action from the Scottish Government.

We will continue to work both with communities and with the Scottish Government to develop solutions that go to the roots of the challenges manifested in our food.

In the lead-up to the Scottish elections, Nourish will be campaigning for a Food, Farming and Health Act that will include many of the measures mentioned above, as part of the new Scottish Food Coalition.