

Recommendations from the Scottish Food Commission for the implementation of, and content for, the Scottish Good Food Nation Bill

Background

In June 2016, Scottish Government Cabinet Secretary, Fergus Ewing announced:

“We are going to consult on a Good Food Nation bill in 2017 and, in doing so, I hope to build a cross-party and stakeholder consensus. We want to enhance the national food policy with the vision of Scotland becoming a Good Food Nation, where people from every walk of life take pride, pleasure and benefit from the food that they buy, serve and eat day by day. Work in shaping the course of the bill will involve colleagues and stakeholders in a number of areas across Government, including health, food standards, waste, social justice, agriculture, education and procurement.”

In November 2016, Cabinet Secretary Angela Constance confirmed in the Government’s response to the Short Life Working Group report on food poverty that:

“Tackling food poverty will be vital to achieving this aspiration and in doing so our actions must also be coherent across a wide range of policy areas including health and nutrition, tackling food waste and working with the food and drink sector. In this context, I would particularly welcome continuing to work with your Group and its members to develop a coherent, partnership-led approach that tackles food poverty and supports the delivery of our wider Good Food Nation objectives. A key part of this engagement would be exploring further your recommendation regarding the right to food and whether this ought to be considered for inclusion within the Good Food Nation Bill.”

The Scottish Food Commission held a Good Food Nation Summit on the 28 September 2017, thus initiating the public consultation process. The Scottish Food Commission had been asked by the Cabinet Secretary to convene a meeting of stakeholders and influencers, to help shape the Scottish Government’s consultation on the Bill.

This document sets out the outputs of the Good Food Nation Summit (a full report from the facilitators and a summary of the conclusions of the Summit are available), and the recommendations of the Scottish Food Commissioners. These recommendations arise partially from the Summit meeting but also include views and opinions arising from the work of the Food Commissioners over the last two and a half years.

Implementation of The Good Food Nation Bill

1. Framework Legislation

The overarching purpose of this legislation is to improve the Scottish food system for the benefit of its citizens, and it is therefore important that this legislation is set out as “framework legislation” with clear intentions, and which starts a direction of travel for any future interpretations of the Bill.

The “spirit” of the Bill should be to define a positive culture and change within the food system, emphasising incentives to deliver the goals of the Bill, as much as, or to a greater degree than, penalties for failing to deliver those goals.

The Bill should not be formed in isolation, particularly as the subject matter: Good Food, is highly cross-cutting in nature. It should be joined-up and deal with food-related issues across the board and across the country, thus complementing numerous relevant, published, strategies in Scotland.

RECOMMENDATION:

(A) Framework legislation should be the basis of The Good Food Nation Bill.

2. Good Food Nation Policies

The Bill should place a statutory duty on all publically funded bodies and larger Scottish food oriented businesses to produce, publish and report on a “Good Food Nation Policy.” That policy would sit alongside existing statutory policies such as Health and Safety.

The policy should be “corporately owned” by the organisation and at the most senior management level of the public entity or the private sector company, as it is for Health and Safety or Data Protection, for example.

The content of the Good Food Nation Policies would follow guidelines that relate to the Good Food Nation Bill principles and definitions, covering for example: planning and licensing; economic development, public health, the environment, sustainable and local food procurement policy; suitable food waste policies; food access and affordability, a duty of care to ensure that vulnerable people are given adequate daily access to fresh and cooked food; and extend public information / education to communities, staff and customers in the areas of health, nutrition, sustainable food, growing, seasonality, cooking etc.

RECOMMENDATION:

(B) There should be a statutory duty on all publically funded bodies and private food businesses operating in Scotland that are substantially food oriented to have in place “A Good Food Nation Policy” in line with the principles and practises of the Good Food Nation, and to report on this through its normal business processes such as an Annual Report or other suitable mechanisms.

3. An Independent Statutory Body

Existing bodies have statutory functions and duties in relation to the food system and environment, however a cross-cutting, holistic approach is needed for the Bill to ensure comprehensive reporting across the range of food issues, and to help maintain the momentum for implementation of change.

Resources must be used effectively to avoid overlap and duplication.

Any new body would need a clear remit and be expected to work with existing bodies. Incentivising and encouraging good practice should come before enforcement and punishment. The Scottish Government plans to develop a “new national public body with specific responsibility for the public’s health”, and its remit, particularly with relation to food, will be important.

RECOMMENDATION:

(C) An independent Statutory Body could be established to ensure the delivery of the Good Food Nation Bill, or ownership of the Good Food Nation’s policies could be allocated to an existing or new body in Scotland.

(D) Prior to the establishment of a new public body there should be a review of Government and Government-funded activity across – SG Food and Drink, Agriculture, Health, Environment, Education, Tourism and the NHS, including funds provided to Non Departmental Public Bodies and other non-government organisations , to establish how to achieve better coordination with more from existing funding.

Content of The Good Food Nation Bill

1. Health

- a) There is a requirement to restrict the promotion and/or marketing of unhealthy food.

Two thirds of adults and a third of children are overweight, therefore people must change what they eat, ideally combining this with regular exercise. The Scottish population is over-exposed to unhealthy foods. Instead, an environment needs to be created where choosing healthy food and making healthy meals is easy and routine, and food contributes to wider health and wellbeing, including mental health. The approach to achieving this includes reducing exposure of people to unhealthy foods, thus increasing better food choices for individuals and families.

RECOMMENDATION:

(E) The promotion and marketing of unhealthy food should be banned in publically owned buildings and at publically funded events.

(F) Incentives should be provided to allow healthy and nutritious food to be more visible to Scotland's population.

- b) There is a requirement for labelling content of food for "out-of-home" eating

Most people in Scotland are overweight: two out of every three adults and one out of every four children. People with a healthy weight are now in the minority. Obesity trends are affected by age, gender and socio-economic status. Obesity is estimated to cost Scotland between £0.9bn and £4.6bn per year. Evidence from Food Standards Scotland also shows that food and drink consumed away from the home is skewed towards less healthy options, such as high fat, salt and sugar ("HFSS") food products with little or no nutritional content. This is symptomatic of the obesogenic environment that Scottish citizens are subjected to in retail, out of home and many of their social eating environments. The Scottish Dietary Survey has clearly shown that we eat and drink too many calories, too much sugar, fat and salt. At the same time, we do not eat enough fruit, vegetables, fibre or oily fish.

RECOMMENDATION:

(G) All food businesses, including restaurants, cafes and other outlets, should be licensed in the same way as applies to alcohol and betting. A condition of the licence (as it exists for food hygiene through the Food Safety Act) should be that, food preparation, purchasing and serving staff are trained in the impacts of food and health and sustainability matters commensurate with their work activity.

(H) All outlets selling food out of home (including takeaways) should label dishes with calorie content.

2. Social Justice

a) There is a requirement to link approach to food poverty with approach to fuel poverty.

Food poverty is the result of multiple economic factors. Measures such as universal basic income and the provision of a “living wage” should improve equal access to food. People in Scotland have the right to free care and there should also be a right to good food for all. This requires political will, public support and a long-term approach, and a partnership between government and local authorities.

Efforts to reduce food poverty should be based on dignity, and participation by the people most affected. Food poverty affects all generations, and includes poverty of experience, stress, isolation and long-term health consequences, as well as shortage of nutrients.

RECOMMENDATION:

(I) Scotland currently has legislation that ensures people who are unable to afford fuel during the winter months are provided with financial support to enable them to keep warm and to cook food. A similar approach should be taken to identify those living with food poverty and to supply them with financial support to enable the purchase of food to support a healthy and nutritious diet.

b) There is a requirement to establish targets for public food procurement to meet Good Food Nation recommendations.

Public food includes prisons, hospitals, residential homes, leisure centres, nurseries as well as schools. Public food should embrace “the eating experience”, not just the food itself. Public sector employers have a particular responsibility to encourage good food at work.

The wider economic, social and environmental benefits of procuring and serving good public food have to feed back into purchasing decisions so that these are not made purely on cost grounds. It is possible to raise the amount of publically-procured food from national, regional and local sources within budget.

RECOMMENDATION:

(J) Public Bodies should be statutorily obliged to record the origin of food (to ensure provenance and traceability, greenhouse gas reductions etc. and use this to measure and report on the impact of food procurement in Scotland.

- i) (K) There should be a requirement - *or if not an normative target* - for public bodies to procure a minimum of 60% of food requirements from suppliers that are based in Scotland and awarded to suppliers in a manner that benefits the 'relevant area'.**

- ii) (L) There should be a commitment in the Bill, in support of the Organic Action Plan, to require in procurements that tenderers offer the price for Organic Food, where it is available, for comparison with the price for non organically produced food.**

3. Environmental Sustainability

There is a requirement for all food businesses to report on food waste.

Food waste remains a huge issue across the supply chain. More household food waste is being collected separately, but there has been less progress on reduction. Some businesses have become more aware as they have started to measure waste and have to meet the costs of disposal. The need for long-term culture change about food waste has been recognised and it needs to become ethically unacceptable. At the same time, it must be easier to do the right thing across the whole supply chain. A circular economy approach should be taken.

RECOMMENDATION:

(M) All organisations providing food, including public bodies such as schools, hospitals, and homes for the elderly, and all private food businesses, should be required to report on amounts of food waste. Measurement of food waste will be recorded using suitable metrics to reduce levels of waste over time. Management of waste should aim to fulfil the Sustainable Development Goals as an overall framework for bringing together economic, social and environmental objectives.

4. Knowledge

There is a requirement for education in schools to support informed choices about food production, and teaching of cooking skills should be compulsory.

There are multiple food cultures in Scotland, and food cultures are more than the food itself – they are about settings, participation, sourcing, and social interaction.

There are frequent reports of children not knowing very basic information about food, including identification of common fruits and vegetables, where meat, milk and eggs come from, and very basic nutrition.

Our food culture in Scotland has become more detached from food production and fast food is a dominant element in our current food culture Scotland would benefit by regaining and strengthening the social / healthy / homemade aspects of our food culture.

We need to learn from the culture changes in relation to smoking and drinking and apply this to food and health. The best long-term approach to tackling overweight and obesity is prevention from childhood and school education has a major role to play. For a variety of reasons, education about food and provision of cooking skills varies across Scotland.

The Bill should also establish an individual right for children and young people from birth to aged 18 to adequate food and nutrition. This may be contingent on individual circumstances but it should apply to early years; and school age, both during school terms and during school vacation periods.

RECOMMENDATION:

(N) A Children and Young Peoples' Food Policy - The Bill should set out the right to food education, and access to good food and nutrition from birth to 18 years of age. The right would include an obligation for schools to provide education in these areas and allow a young person who is in need to claim an individual right to food.

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