

# **Understanding the Good Food Nation Bill**

## **May 2019**

### **Introduction**

The Scottish Government have proposed to develop holistic legislation about food, The Good Food Nation Bill. The proposed Bill will cover the whole food system from growing, harvesting, processing, marketing, selling, preparing, access to food right through to food disposal. The Bill also extends to schools, hospitals, retailers, cafes and restaurants who are required to sell 'good' food. This briefing aims to provide an overview of the aims of the proposed Bill, why it is needed and what is missing from the proposals.

### **The need for a Good Food Nation Bill**

The food system in Scotland faces a number of challenges. One factor of the whole food system is consumption, and Scotland is experiencing increasing obesity rates. Poor diets are one of the leading causes of ill health in Scotland, with over 65% of adults aged 16-64 (that is one in four adults) either overweight or obese compared to 62% of the European population. Obesity is reported to reduce life expectancy by an average of three years, or eight to ten years for severe obesity. There is a higher prevalence of obesity amongst people living in deprivation, particularly among women, children, older age groups, black and minority ethnic groups, and people with disabilities. Obesity adversely affects almost every part of our body and has been recognised as the single biggest public health challenge we face. Obesity can increase the risk of a number of physical and mental health conditions, such as Type 2 Diabetes, 11 different types of cancer, cardiovascular disease, Alzheimer's disease, depression, stigma and social isolation.

Another aspect of the whole food system is food production. Scotland faces a number of discrepancies for example; Scotland is the UK's leading fishing nation landing 464,000 tonnes of sea fish and shellfish worth over £559m in 2017. However, as a nation we are not meeting our Scottish Dietary Goal for oil rich fish and should be eating five times more oily fish than we do currently.

In recent years, we have seen an increase in food insecurity often referred to as food poverty. Food insecurity is defined as the 'inability to consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food for health, in a socially acceptable manner, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so'. In Scotland, we have seen a dramatic increase in Foodbank usage from around 14,332 people receiving food aid in 2012/13 to 117,689 people in 2014/15, with almost a third of those being children. Around 19% of people in Scotland were living in relative poverty in 2014-17, representing one million people each year. Almost one in four (240,000) children are officially recognised as living in poverty with two thirds of children in in-work poverty (both before and after housing costs), living in households with at least one member

in paid work. It is recognised that households with low incomes spend a greater proportion of their household income, almost twice as much, on food and non-alcoholic drink compared to wealthier households and are often forced to prioritise calories over nutrients.

Agriculture is also having an adverse impact on our environment with agriculture and related land use accounting for over 26% of net greenhouse gas emissions, the second largest source in Scotland. These emissions not only have an effect on our health through climate change and reducing air quality, but also by affecting the quality, quantity and price of the foods we produce and consume. We also have a large amount of food wastage. According to a report by Zero Waste Scotland, over 1.35 million tonnes of food and drink is thrown out every year in Scotland; under half of this comes from households, with the majority coming from industry and commercial enterprise. More needs to be done to reduce food waste by ensuring that people are empowered to make better decisions and that businesses take more responsibility to reduce their waste and recycle the unavoidable food wastage.

Reducing the burden of diet-related ill-health is an important goal for the Scottish Government and they have implemented a number of policies and strategies to tackle this. These include the Healthier Future Delivery Plan, the Food Standards Scotland's consultation on proposals to improve the Out of Home food environment as well as calls for proposals to implement a 9pm watershed on junk food adverts. There are also a number of policies that aim to tackle the wider social, economic and environmental factors that can affect the whole food system. However, there needs to be a more joined up approach between these different policies and strategies with a focus on Health in All Policies in order to realise the change that is required.

## **What does the proposed Bill Cover?**

The proposed Bill suggests that the Scottish Government and public authorities should:

1. Make a policy about food.
2. Have the food policy cover the whole food system, including things like growing, harvesting, processing, marketing, selling, preparing, eating food and disposing of the waste. It would also include how people access the best food for themselves and their families, and how food is managed in places like schools and hospitals.
3. Be clear about how they are going to measure progress.
4. Think about this food policy when making decisions.
5. Ask the public for their views when they are writing the policy.
6. Make the policy publicly available.
7. Look back at the policy every 5 years and update if needed.
8. Report about how well they are doing every 2 years.

9. Think about their international commitments at each stage of the process, including when they are writing the policy, carrying out their agreed actions and reporting on progress.

There is also a strong commitment to be clear about how progress is measured, with a biennial reporting structure and five yearly review.

## **Why a single over-arching bill as opposed to targeted legislation?**

A single piece of overarching legislation, such as a Good Food Nation Bill, offers the opportunity to employ a whole food systems approach, which can enable policy coherence across nutrition, health, agriculture, trade, climate and the environment, through the public, private and third sectors. A report by the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies has highlighted the traction that the concept of 'food as a system' has gained internationally and the momentum behind 'a more integrated approach to decision-making'. They also acknowledge that not much has happened in this regard; in Scotland we have an opportunity to develop and implement this joined up approach with the Good Food Nation Bill and set a precedent.

The Good Food Nation Programme of Measures listed the relevant current and planned activities across the five key areas identified by the Food Commission; health, social justice, knowledge, environmental sustainability and prosperity, demonstrating the level of activity across a range of areas. In order to coordinate activity across these different areas and ensure work continues in a joined up manner with clear goals and outcomes there is a need for a single cross-cutting overarching piece of legislation.

## **What does the proposed Bill not include?**

### **Clear and co-produced food plans across all sectors**

Ministers and other public authorities should write food policies alongside a range of stakeholders from various sectors and use these to guide their ongoing work. These plans must be stronger than before, with more people from different sectors and fields including the third sector, health, environment, welfare, workers' rights, working together alongside different areas of Scottish Government to write and deliver them. These policies should relate to all parts of the food system including policies to reduce food insecurity by raising incomes of the households most affected.

In 2014, the Scottish Government published *Becoming a Good Food Nation* - a national food and drink policy that included an inspiring vision for the future of Scotland's food. However, progress has been slow because the plan has not been specific about where responsibilities for actions lie and about accountability for these actions. This means that businesses and other parts of Scottish Government could choose whether or not to follow the policy, and there was no timetable for reporting or clear indicators of success. The current proposal for the Good Food Nation Bill states that 'Ministers and public authorities should prepare statements of policy, have regard to them in the exercise of relevant functions, and report on implementation, with regard to international obligations and guidance'. Obesity

Action Scotland have called for the Food Commission's recommendation, 'to place a statutory duty on food oriented businesses to produce, publish and report on a Good Food Nation Policy' to be implemented. They have based this on learning from a range of schemes such as The Public Health Responsibility Deal in England and Supporting Healthy Choices in Scotland, where not all businesses implemented the changes and those that did were at a disadvantage for doing so. Therefore, it is important that there is a statutory duty that includes Ministers, Public Authorities as well as industry organisations and that these plans are written and delivered in a cohesive manner with all sectors working together.

## **Strengthening the Right to Food**

More needs to be done to explicitly and practically embed food as a human right into every stage and process of our Scottish Food system. The core pillars of the right to food are that food must be:

1. Accessible both financially and geographically
2. Adequate, meeting dietary needs, being free from harmful chemicals, and being culturally appropriate – including the means of how we access it
3. Available through access to land and other resources, processing, distribution and marketing and the sustainability of the food system in to the future - including its contribution to and resilience to climate change<sup>1</sup>

Although these are expressed in the ambitions of the Good Food Nation Bill, there needs to be more explicit mention to a right to food and clear definitions of what that would look like as well as how it will be achieved and monitored.

One component of a right to food is an end to food poverty and insecurity. The continued development of foodbanks is evidence of food poverty and insecurity and is one way in which some parts of the third sector are responding to a need. Clearly foodbanks remain very controversial which is why it is important that policy and legislation enshrines people's right to access adequate food in a dignified manner.

Pilton Community Health Project has called for a focus on food as a human right in its report, 'Hungry for Change'<sup>2</sup>. It has highlighted the issue of food insecurity or food poverty and how this inhibits people's ability to adequately feed themselves. It has called for improvements in the availability and affordability of food as well as the development of local food activities as a means of developing a local food economy. Local third sector initiatives have the ability to work with often very vulnerable people and deliver a wide range of outcomes. For example, Bridgend Inspiring Growth in South Edinburgh has provided young people with training, qualifications and experience in producing and serving low cost, healthy meals to older people, disabled people and families on low incomes, via a pop-up community café. Their highly popular 'Come Dine With Me' project has run in Craigmillar and Bingham, both areas of socio-economic deprivation. With input from a private sector, award-winning chef, the project uses an approach that successfully combines education, community development and a social activity, building a kinder, more social community at the same time as addressing food poverty and poor awareness of healthy food options.

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<sup>1</sup> ibid

<sup>2</sup> Pilton Community Health Project. Hungry for Change. 2017

These local actions need to be embedded within Ministerial and public authority plans in order to ensure that the most disadvantaged groups, who may not engage with statutory services, are supported.

### **Links to wider policies, strategies and legislation**

There is also a need for cross-cutting national food plans that are developed through consultation with a wide range of stakeholders including people experiencing food insecurity, voluntary and community sector organisations alongside private and public sector organisations.

There are a number of Scottish Government policies and strategies that have an impact on the food environment, from a range of different portfolios. Some of these include A Healthier Future Strategy, the draft High, Fat Sugar and Salt Levy, and Best Start Foods. It is important for the success of the Good Food Nation Bill and its ambitions that the various policies and strategies focusing on food relate back to the Good Food Nation Bill and more importantly relate to one another in order to create a coherent set of multidisciplinary and cross portfolio actions to improve the food environment in Scotland.

More widely, it is important to understand the relationship between the food environment, health and the wider environment. Currently, rather than one overall plan for food - we have individual plans that focus on issues in isolation, such as the Climate Change Plan, Diet & Obesity Plan and Food and Drink Industry Plan. Without bridging the gaps between these areas then we cannot see the whole picture or solve the problems that we are facing.

The main aim of the Good Food Nation Bill is to harmonise the work of all sectors in order to create a positive food environment from production to consumption to recycling. In order to do this in the most productive way the health implications of the food environment should be considered.

### **For further information contact:**

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