

# Cross-Party Group on Food

28 November 2023 at 6pm, Committee Room 4  
and Teams

Minute

Present

MSPs

Annie Wells MSP (Chair)  
Rhoda Grant MSP  
Jim Fairlie MSP

Non-MSP Group Members

In person

Kirsty Tinsdale, Food and Drink Federation Scotland/CPG Food Secretary  
Cat Hay, Food and Drink Federation Scotland  
Robert Logan, SAOS  
Ross Lilley, NatureScot  
Sarah Duley, Soil Association Scotland  
Sarah Gowanlock, Soil Association Scotland  
Caroline Timmins, Queen Margaret University  
Kirsty Jenkins, OneKind  
Anneli Lofstedt, University of Aberdeen  
Pete Ritchie, Nourish Scotland  
Colin Smith, Scottish Wholesale Association  
Michelle McWilliams, the Rowett Institute, University of Aberdeen  
Baukje de Roos, the Rowett Institute, University of Aberdeen  
Iain Clunie, Food and Drink Federation Scotland  
Laura Wyness, Nutrition Research & Communications  
Tracy McCollin, the Scottish Government  
Lisa Nowak, the Scottish Government  
Stephanie Mander, the Scottish Government  
Emma Henderson, the Scottish Government  
Ramona Branza, the Scottish Government  
Jules Griffin, the Rowett Institute, University of Aberdeen  
Eleonora Vanello, Prosper  
Abigail McCall, Nourish Scotland  
Jayne Swanson, Scottish Wholesale Association

Virtually

Ruth Watson, Keep Scotland the Brand  
Dzeti Zait, Peacock Salt  
David Watts, the Rowett Institute, University of Aberdeen  
Sara Smith, the Royal Highland Education Trust  
Nicola Holden, SRUC  
Graeme Findlay, SQA  
Frances Bain, Nesta  
Stephen Kelly  
Peter Faassen de Heer, the Scottish Government  
Natasha Martins  
Lusi Alderslowe, Propagate  
Laura Thomson, MECOPP  
Beatrice Morrice, NFUS  
Ylva Haglund, Scottish Wholesale Association  
Martin Carle, CFINE  
Paul Rooke, British Coffee Association  
Lorna Dawson, James Hutton Institute  
Carrie Ruxton, Nutritionist & Health Writer  
Charlotte Maltin, Biomics Ltd  
Simon Macdonald, Fisheries and Processing Consultant  
Sandra Williamson, the Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland  
Marie-Amélie Viatte, the Power of Food Festival/Granton Community Gardeners  
Liz Barron-Majerik, Lantra Scotland  
Christine Fraser, Food Training Scotland  
Bill Crosson, IFST  
Sterre Vester, SAC Consulting, SRC  
Claire Hislop, Public Health Scotland  
Orchid Liu, UK Chinese Times  
Jane Bunting, the Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland  
Rachel Robson  
Lisa Hislop, NFUS  
Mandy Morgan, Scottish Pantry Network  
Tilly Robinson-Miles, Food Train  
Sharon McWilliams, Company Shop  
Stuart Grant, Scottish Parliament  
Jackie McCabe, The Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland

## 1. Apologies for Absence

These were received from Martin Meteyard, Wendy Barrie, Bosse Dahlgren, Keith Robson, David Thomson, Jennifer Forsyth, Mary Lawton, Sally Measom, Hamish Macdonell, Mary Brennan, Colin Smyth MSP.

## 2. Minutes of the Last Meeting (5 September 2023)

The minutes of the last meeting were proposed by Cat Hay and seconded by Rhoda Grant MSP (RG) and therefore approved and noted as a fair reflection of proceedings.

AW reminded members of the group that minutes from these meetings are publicly available and so if you feel anything needs corrected please get in touch with [Kirsty Tinsdale](#).

## 3. Matters Arising

AW noted that Kirsty Tinsdale would share the CPG on Food minutes from the May, September and November meetings with Scottish Government officials as part of the draft good Food Nation plan consultation. The consultation is due to be published in early 2024.

AW advised that Mari Gougeon MSP - Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands - was due to attend tonight's meeting, but unfortunately was unable to. She is keen to come to our next meeting to discuss the draft national plan.

**Post meeting note:** [The Good Food Nation National Plan](#) was published on 24 January 2024. The [consultation](#) will run until 22 April 2024. The Cabinet Secretary will attend the next meeting on 27 February to discuss the consultation.

## 4. Good Food Nation: A sustainable supply chain

Annie Wells MSP (AW) introduced the theme and thanked the speakers for joining us.

**Ross Lilley (RLI), Head of Natural Resource Management, NatureScot**

RLI's [presentation](#) focused on the climate and nature food challenge. The key points included:

- The Paris Agreement held us all globally to temperature rises of no more than 1.5 degrees.
- If there is a global temperature rise of beyond 2 degrees, climate change becomes much less predictable as does the ability of our eco-systems to regulate and sustain us.
- The globe has used 50% of the carbon budget that we have available - current trends show without substantial additional emissions reduction, we will use the remaining 50% by 2030 before that temperature continues to rise.
- It's important to adapt to climate change now. In Scotland we have experienced increased summer droughts and increased precipitation (particularly in the winter) affecting the way we manage our land and produce food from it.

- There is a twin challenge of biodiversity with a 24% decline in abundance of our species in Scotland since 1994, and a 14% contraction in species range since 1970.
- We have had success in reducing carbon emission with a significant amount of that due to energy production change.
- We have made less progress in reducing land emissions – which account for 50% of the total Scottish emissions.
- That means there is a huge amount of pressure on our land to absorb that carbon, stop emitting carbon, adapt to climate change and produce food.
- Scotland is nature poor which makes us vulnerable to climate risks.
- There is an opportunity through the Scottish Government's Vision for Agriculture and the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill to be a global leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture. This means supporting farmers to adapt to climate change and to restore nature while continuing to produce high quality food.
- Regenerative farming principles focus on restoring and conserving soils, landscapes and ecosystems. Key practices include minimising soil disturbance, maximising crop diversity, and integrating livestock and arable farming more closely. The goals are to improve animal welfare, increase climate-resilience of production, capturing carbon in soils and vegetation, enhance water quality and supply in the landscape, and support thriving biodiversity and ecosystem health.

### **Robert Logan (RLO), Head of Co-op Development, SAOS**

The key points from RLO's [presentation](#) included:

- SAOS has members across Scotland in every sector of primary production ranging from soft fruits, daffodil growing, potatoes, shellfish, pork to red meat.
- The collective membership of these Scottish producer co-ops' is 25,000 members, with a turnover of some £1bn, representing a significant part of Scottish agriculture.
- Co-operation is about helping people to help themselves. Where a group of people identify that they have a shared goal that can be achieved collectively but could not be achieved individually.
- A co-op's purpose is resolutely focused on generating value for its members, and not in generating a return from capital invested, for external shareholders.
- The need for producer cooperation is greater than ever before with many key challenges to deliver relating to productivity and profitability, and then on behalf of society; all whilst producing high quality food.
- The farming industry needs to take ownership of challenges but better communicate the great amount that it does right and continues to improve.
- Co-operation allows farmers to employ professional people and specialist skills. As well as co-ordinating supply and getting the right product to the right market, producer co-ops' is now looking at product development and innovations. For example, horizontal integration, data management and agronomy.
- We should celebrate that our Scottish producers are able to produce safe and nutritious food at a highly competitive price point but there is a balance to ensure that price point allows producers to be profitable, confident in the future, and

therefore willing to invest in further technology, efficiencies, and enhanced conservation measures.

- When working towards achieving a good food nation we need to ensure additional burdens are not placed on individual farmers. It shouldn't become a tick box exercise but provide opportunities for sustainable growth.
- As the Agriculture Bill makes it through the Scottish Parliament there was a plea to remember the benefits of co-ops and how they can support sustainable supply chains. In addition, it was thought that there is a need to improve the position of farmers within the value chain.

### **Sarah Duley (SD), Head of Food, Soil Association Scotland**

The key points from SD's [presentation](#) included:

- The Food for Life Scotland Programme is run by Soil Association Scotland and funded by the Scottish Government.
- The vision of the programme is for good food to become the easy choice for everyone – food that's good for health, the environment, and the economy.
- Activities include supporting caterers to serve meals using locally sourced and nutritious ingredients; and advocating for good food as an investment and not a cost.
- A key tool the programme uses is the Food for Life Served Here award, which is available UK wide to almost any setting or establishment that serves food.
- In Scotland there is a focus on supporting local authorities to achieve the Food for Life standards across bronze, silver and gold. As well as a public sector expansion pilot happening in Glasgow, where all public sector caterers can access free support to achieve Food for Life and to date the Scottish Government workplaces and the Scottish Courts and Tribunal Services have achieved the award.
- The Programme works with 17 local authorities across Scotland – with almost half of all meals in Scottish primary schools currently Food for Life Served Here certified.
- There are many success stories included within the slides that SD can provide more info on.
- The Food for Life Served Here award provides Scottish local authorities and health boards with a framework to deliver on the principles within the national and local Good Food Nation plans. This includes taking a systems-based approach to food provision, climate change mitigation, halting and reversing biodiversity loss, improvement in animal welfare, improving health and wellbeing and ensuring the importance of the food business sector in achieving the aims.
- Soil Association Scotland's thoughts on how to develop a sustainable supply chain include:
  - Investment in public catering budgets
  - More strategic, coordinated approach to public sector food and drink data
  - Targets for local, organic and sustainable sourcing
  - Greater take up of Food for Life Served Here

- Removing barriers for primary producers to access public procurement opportunities
- Local processing capacity and producer co-ops.

The following was noted in the open debate:

- The Scottish Wholesale Association (SWA) – in partnership with SAOs and Scotland Food & Drink – has developed a training and education programme to help local producers understand wholesale as a route to market.
- Colin Smith (CS) (SWA) thought that it is important that good food nation policy recognises the full supply chain and takes into account the complex food supply chains in Scotland and Great Britain.
- AW noted the importance of the good food nation plan being sustainable, looking at all aspects of our food production and the climate change emergency.
- The standards of the different levels of Food for Life Served Here was discussed. SD said at silver and gold level - caterers are rewarded for spend on Scottish produce. There are targets for the spend on organic food but not for the amount of Scottish produce. It is difficult to measure food origin data as some suppliers don't have the capacity or infrastructure or will to gather that information.
- There was a debate on whether the public sector was the key to unlocking the financial market for food and drink in Scotland:
  - Jim Fairlie MSP (JF) said that £150 million is spent on public sector food and £12 billion is spent on retail in this country.
  - CS agreed that the supermarkets sell the largest proportion of food in Scotland but noted that they don't reach settings such as hospitality, tourism, leisure centres and the public sector. He thought it was difficult for the public sector and smaller stores to compete with the larger retailers on price so they need to differentiate their offering – selling products from different local producers.
  - It was thought the public sector has got a huge role to play in terms of education and getting people to start thinking about where food comes from.
- Rhoda Grant MSP noted that it is challenging for small farming businesses that are starting to think about selling to local authorities to make their food available locally. She considered that businesses selling to supermarkets find that their produce ends up travelling a large distance to a distribution hub and then travelling back to be sold in the local community. She thought that we need to find ways around that and make local food more accessible.
- JF thought there is a need for cooperation but change only happens when landowners and farmers work together and that is not always the case.
- JF considered what role a Grocery Code Adjudicator could have if it looked at the whole supply chain and not just the supermarkets.
- A whole range of questions were asked within the discussion on the Good Food Nation plans and what Scotland wants to achieve.
  - What are the plans going to deliver and what are we hoping that they are going to deliver?

- Are we going to ask them to deliver too much?
  - Will they have the powers they need to deliver what they need to achieve?
  - Will they change the narrative for a farming community without placing more burdens on farmers?
  - Do we actually want to have a food system in this country?
  - Do we want to grow food in this country and do we need to?
  - What are we trying to do - is it to feed our nation? Is it to retain communities within a rural population? Is it to have a resilient food supply chain?
  - How can we have community supported agriculture embedded when the people needed to deliver the good food nation within the local authorities are not in place yet?
  - How can we reset the balance so that farmers are profitable but that people have access to food that is nutritious and affordable?
  - How can we ensure farmers get paid for being the guardians of the landscape?
- RLI said it is difficult for a farmer to influence the price unless they're part of a very powerful cooperative. He thought that supermarkets may be prepared to pay a premium if they are confident that the premium they pay is a fair price compared to their competitors. He felt that could be informed by a standard that government sets.
  - Lisa Hislop (NFUS) thought that the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill must have the tools and mechanisms and powers to enable farmers and crofters to deliver on the good food nation ambitions and the vision for agriculture. She considered that public goods such as nature and biodiversity credits are delivered at private cost to farmer and crofters. She noted that livestock production is a long-term industry with farmers making decisions when they don't know what their market return would be.
  - RLI thought that regenerative farming principles are a more sustainable and more efficient way of producing something out of the soil that farmers have.
  - JF thought we need to reduce what it costs to get the finished product on the market.
  - Pete Ritchie (Nourish) thought we need to change what we produce and how we produce it for climate and nature. He thought that we don't have a food system that always wants to pay a premium for the new way we want to produce things.
  - JF and AW noted the challenge of getting more local food on the marketplace with the cost-of-living crisis.
  - RLI noted that Scotland has world leading academic institutions who can demonstrate how to produce food while benefiting climate, nature and biodiversity.
  - Simon Macdonald (fisheries and processing consultant) highlighted the importance of the blue economy – looking beyond farming for a food source. He noted that sea temperature this year was four or five degrees higher than it was a year or two years ago and new species of fish are appearing.
  - Jules Griffin (the Rowett Institute) thought we need to consider nutrition when working towards a good food nation. He noted there is research looking at calories or nutrition density per hectare that could be used as a measure. He noted that we export vitamin D, polyunsaturated fat and vitamin B12 which could help with cardiovascular disease.
  - Laura Wynes (freelance nutritionist) highlighted that a Scottish Eat Well Guide has been produced in collaboration with Nutrition Scotland and Scotland Food & Drink.

The aim is to make people more aware of the diversity of local nutritious Scottish food.

- Tilly Robinson-Miles (Food Train) said that it's really important to bring the social aspects into this conversation. She thought that in the UK and Scotland food is considered a commodity and not a public good which has an impact on people who are more vulnerable in society. She noted that there have been budget cuts to services such as Meals on Wheels which give vulnerable people access to food.
- SD thought it would be helpful in the context of Tilly's remarks if Food for Life Served Here could have further investment to reach a broader range of settings such as the care sector.
- AW noted that due to budget cuts local communities have lost opportunities for people to access food and enjoy sharing a meal together. She is contacting businesses in her constituency to seek help with the supply of food.
- Eleonora Vanello (Prosper) noted they are looking at how businesses can help to prevent illness and absenteeism. She thought it would be interesting to look at whether food could be used as measure in this work.

## 5. AOB

There was no other business raised.

## 6. Dates of the next meeting

The next meeting will take place on 27 February at 6pm at the Scottish Parliament. There will also be an option to join online via Teams.