

A Scottish Food & Drink Policy: The Next Steps

Briefing on ...

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Introduction

This briefing looks at the Scottish Government's outline plans for a national Food and Drink Policy. In June 2008 Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment Richard Lochhead announced a number of 'next steps' in developing the policy. This followed a consultation, launched in January, on the discussion paper 'Choosing the Right Ingredients', The Future for Food in Scotland.

Background

Food is a major global political issue as never before, with increasing pressure on world leaders to act urgently on the food crisis threatening millions in the developing world, and on climate change. Tackling food policy in a cross-cutting way at every level of government, here and internationally, makes sense. Just two examples of the interactions between different policy areas are 1) the impact of what we eat on health and tackling obesity, and 2) the use of biofuels, seen by some as one way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but now acknowledged as stoking the global food crisis because crops are being grown for fuel not food.

The Scottish Government discussion document in January said: "Our vision for food in Scotland is that it should make the nation healthier, wealthier and smarter, with production making communities stronger and consumption respecting the local and global environment." UNISON Scotland welcomed the proposed holistic, joined-up approach, given the range of areas that food policy links into, including climate change, health, education, transport etc. We said **sustainability should be at the heart of food policy** and urged a 'Food for Good' policy across the public sector to help change the diet and health of the nation.

Aim and next steps

Richard Lochhead said his aim is a National Food and Drink Policy which "will promote Scotland's sustainable economic growth by ensuring the focus of all food and drink-related activity by Government offers quality, health and wellbeing and sustainability, whilst recognising the need for access to affordable food for all." He announced it will also cover drink (alcoholic and non-alcoholic) and he unveiled a small number of new measures - part of ongoing development of the policy. These include:

- An inquiry into affordable access to food, in light of the global rise in food prices.
- A new £2.5m Scottish Government catering contract which leads by example with greater emphasis on

healthier menus, and the procurement of fresh and seasonal produce.

- A focus on food education through Scotland's first Cooking Bus, teaching healthy, practical cooking skills to pupils, parents and community groups.
- A Food & Drink Leadership Forum.
- A skills strategy for the industry.
- A working group of producers, processors, the hospitality industry and public sector procurement specialists to produce guidance to Scotland's public sector, on becoming an exemplar for sustainable economic growth.

Public sector food procurement is worth £85m (incl. £45.8m for schools and £24.6m for the NHS). The working group will be led by Robin Gourlay, of East Ayrshire Council, where pioneering work showed it is possible to provide healthy, locally sourced, fresh, quality school meals at a reasonable cost.

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Future action and related initiatives

The Scottish Government has set five key themes for the future policy:

- Supporting the sustainable economic growth of the food and drink industry (from current value to Scots economy of £7.3bn to target of £10bn by 2017)
- Supporting consumers and working with the food and drink industry to support healthier and more environmentally sustainable choices through better food education about the impact on health and environment.
- Celebrating and enhancing Scotland's reputation as a Land of Food and Drink.
- Walking the talk - Getting Government to lead the way.
- Affordability, access and security in relation to food.

Other work includes: assessing Food Supply Chain Resilience; guidance for the hospitality industry on provenance, quality, health, and environmental

sustainability; a campaign led by Martin Wishart to improve the quality and visibility of Scottish produce being used in restaurants, bars and other venues; and a 'Supermarket Summit', raising food issues with the sector.

Schools

Pilot schemes in five areas offering free meals to primary one to three children are being evaluated. From August new food regulations mean all primary schools will stop providing snacks, sweets and fizzy drinks, with healthier meals menus on offer. Secondaries will follow suit by August 2009.

Hospitals

The new Food, Fluid and Nutrition programme in the NHS will see improved nutritional standards set with regular monitoring.

Developing the policy - and UK Government action

UNISON Scotland welcomes some of the limited initial action announced, but the final policy will require proper resourcing to ensure that fine aspirations are turned into reality. There is no indication of a commitment to ensuring funds will be available, nor where such funding will come from.

We also believe the food and drink policy should have a strong emphasis on **Sustainability, Health, Social Justice, Excellence and Skills**. These are the key areas covered in our Food for Good Charter for the public sector. The policy should also have an international element, addressing climate change, fair trade, and the major impact of rising energy, fuel and food prices on the most vulnerable in society, here and across the world. In the interests of health and

sustainability, we need well-resourced quality public sector catering provided by directly employed staff with proper training and good employment conditions.

UK

In July the UK Cabinet Office published 'Food Matters: Towards a Strategy for the 21st Century'. This says that government should lead by example. A new 'Healthier Food Mark' will be linked to standards for more nutritious, environmentally sustainable food in the public sector. The report looks at the environmental impact of the food sector and says about 70,000 premature deaths could be avoided annually if diets matched nutritional guidelines – about 42,000 by reaching the 5 A DAY target for fruit and vegetable consumption.

Action for Branches

- Promote Food for Good Charter with employers, asking them to adopt it. Use materials in campaigning and recruitment.
- Link Food for Good to Green Workplace campaigning, where relevant.
- Raise issues around procurement with employers, including - from the Charter - sustainability, fresh and seasonal produce, fair trade and animal welfare.
- Keep the P&I team updated.

Further Information

Richard Lochhead speech on Food & Drink Policy Next Steps:

www.scotland.gov.uk/News/This-Week/Speeches/Greener/food

UNISON Scotland Food for Good Charter and materials:

www.unison-scotland.org.uk/foodforgood/index.html

UNISON Scotland Response to Future for Food discussion paper:

www.unison-scotland.org.uk/response/futurefood.html