



Becoming a Good Food Nation: Response to the Scottish Government consultation on Scotland's National Food & Drink Policy

**The UNISON Scotland submission to the Scottish Government consultation
on Recipe for Success: Scotland's National Food & Drink Policy Discussion
Document 'Becoming a Good Food Nation'**

Oct 2014

Introduction

UNISON is Scotland's largest trade union representing more than 155,000 members delivering services across Scotland. Our members deliver a wide range of services in the public, community and private sector. A considerable number work in areas relevant to this consultation, including in public service catering, in a variety of roles. Many have remits that include food and/or health and nutrition and related areas, in the NHS, social care and in educational settings, including schools, colleges and universities, as well as those working in procurement. UNISON represents meat hygiene inspectors and vets working in abattoirs and meat plants. And we represent local government Environmental Health Officers who are involved with the inspection of food premises and undertake food sampling and educational and advice services across Scotland.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Government consultation on Recipe for Success: Scotland's National Food & Drink Policy Discussion Document 'Becoming a Good Food Nation'.¹

In this brief response we provide some key background context and suggested priorities and answer questions that are relevant to our points.

Background

UNISON Scotland has said consistently since before the Scottish Government first consulted about a national food and drink policy, that it makes total sense to draw together a range of policy areas as they affect food, including climate change, sustainable development, health, education, transport etc., addressing issues such as public sector food procurement, food labelling, animal welfare and local sourcing of food. We raised the importance of poverty, via supporting universal free school meals, of skills and training and of major problems with PFI/PPP, privatisation and compulsory competitive tendering (CCT). These are all examples of issues relevant to food policy. They remain key factors.

We summarised our proposals for public service catering in our Food for Good Charter, updated in October 2013². This calls for food in schools, hospitals, nurseries, care homes, prisons and other public services to be fresh, local, healthy and sustainable, taking account of local and global social justice factors. We welcome the fact that 'Becoming A Good Food Nation' (BGFN) proposes prioritising food in the public sector. Much good work is under way, but far more can be and should be done, including now making use of the changes from the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 to dramatically increase ethical sustainable procurement of food, as well as to promote other initiatives including extending the Scottish Living Wage to contractors³, a priority area for us.

Priorities – inequalities, food poverty, the Living Wage and food safety

Food policy affects a number of budget areas and should be cross cutting. The discussion document acknowledges significant challenges including on health, attitudes, habits and low expectations, and on threats to global food security such as climate change. However, there is no mention of food poverty and the massive increase in the use of food banks. While some of the economic factors to tackle

¹ www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0045/00453219.pdf

² www.unison-scotland.org.uk/foodforgood/2013FoodforGoodCharter.pdf

³ www.unison-scotland.org.uk/briefings/b056_BargainingBrief_ExtendingLivingWage_July2014.pdf

this are not the focus for 'Becoming a Good Food Nation', we believe they should be seen as part of the picture and taken into account in the specific policy areas being tackled under this remit.

You cannot have an idealistic 'vision' in this document for 2025 of "people from every walk of life" taking pride and pleasure in the food served day by day in Scotland, separated entirely from the current reality of a 400% increase in the use of food banks here⁴, and of 220,000 (one in five) children living in poverty, with campaigners warning that UK Government tax and benefit changes are set to drive a further 100,000 into poverty.⁵ Low pay is seen by the Child Poverty Action Group and others as one of the major factors. Children's food is rightly proposed in the discussion document as a priority area for action. We would argue that this policy should take these facts into account when working with industry employers on food quality and on the vision, with one strong area for action being promotion of the Living Wage. While it is not the food industry's role alone to tackle poverty, it must play its fair part and this would be a strong commitment to the vision that the food industry should be a "thriving well-known feature of local and national economies."

Without going into all the reasons why this should be taken on board as a part of the whole picture on food, we highlight the harrowing scale of in-work poverty, a major feature of this October's Challenge Poverty Week. In 2012 nearly 60% of children living in poverty were living in a working household, as acknowledged by First Minister Alex Salmond at the STUC's A Just Scotland conference on 15 October. UNISON's own work on the need for a pay rise and the Living Wage was highlighted this week in our report *The Price of Everything and the Value of Wages*.⁶ This shows the extent to which years of zero or below inflation pay rises have left workers struggling with the soaring cost of food, fuel, childcare and rent, among other essentials. As one university cleaner notes, in our report *Dishing the Dirt*⁷, *"It has got worse in the past three years...the wages don't change but the cost of living just seems to go up and up..how can people live healthily when the healthy foods cost so much and the prices keep going up?"*

A study of UNISON members working for the NHS in the Greater Glasgow and Clyde area⁸ found that 48% of the 1700 who responded were experiencing in-work poverty, with food and other bills a real burden. An earlier report *The Cuts Don't Work*⁹ told how public services are under threat and how workers are being hit hard by the 'austerity' cuts. Our new report *Austerity Economics Don't Add Up*¹⁰ details the reasons why we are calling for an end to austerity and for politicians to put fairness and tackling inequality at the heart of economic policy.

Globally, the food system, acknowledged to be under threat from climate change, is failing millions of people, with starvation, hunger and malnourishment a daily

⁴ www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_Welfare_Reform_Committee/Reports/wrr-14-02w.pdf

⁵ www.cpag.org.uk/content/child-poverty-map-shows-shocking-levels-hardship-across-scotland-0

⁶ www.unison-scotland.org.uk/publicworks/PriceofEverything+ValueofWages_Oct2014.pdf

⁷ www.unison-scotland.org.uk/worthit/cleanerssurvey.pdf

⁸ <http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/healthcare/UnisonFinalReportStandardsofLiving.pdf>

⁹ www.unison-scotland.org.uk/publicworks/TheCutsDontWork_UNISONScotlandReport_June2014.pdf

¹⁰ www.unison-scotland.org.uk/publicworks/AusterityEconomics_UNISONScotlandReport_Oct2014.pdf

reality in too many countries. As noted in the recent report from Common Weal, Food in a Common Weal Scotland¹¹:

“The [current Western] food system is also ruthlessly focused on profit, not on feeding people well or preserving the planet for future generations. And the cost of consumer convenience in the West includes enduring hunger and an epidemic of obesity.”

Talk of eating well and quality food is somewhat academic, unless we tackle this substantial economic unfairness and inequality, locally and globally. The discussion document barely mentions these aspects, even though they are highly relevant to a nation acknowledged to have “world beating levels of diet-related disease and an uneasy relationship with its food.” It clearly should, particularly on page 17 dealing with diet, people being ‘disconnected’ from their food and global food security. A small example of the document’s disconnect is that it doesn’t refer to Fair Trade, despite Scotland having recently become a ‘Fair Trade Nation’.¹² It references some good projects working with people on low incomes. However, it makes no real connection with the fact that on food, as with health inequalities, (as we point out in our 2014 report¹³) many of the access issues are caused by the unfair distribution of income, wealth and power.

On food safety, we made clear with our Food for Good Charter update last October, and reiterate now, that food quality in public service settings and essential food safety checks affecting everyone are at risk from ‘austerity’ cutbacks¹⁴. The Scottish Government will be negligent on food safety if it fails to act on warnings¹⁵ from ourselves and others about ensuring that the new regulatory body Foods Standards Scotland makes the interests of consumers paramount. We have urged MSPs to legislate for higher standards¹⁶ and have pointed out the problems for the industry created by the Scottish Government promulgating regulations that allow the visual only inspection of pigs in abattoirs. This means tumours and abscesses will be minced into the sausages and pies we eat. Not exactly the mark of a Good Food Nation. Nor good for the industry if there is a repeat of any of the various food scandals from recent years.

Finally, on free school meals, we welcomed the announcement earlier this year that P1-P3 children would get free healthy school lunches.¹⁷ However, we want to know that the Scottish Government is fully funding this, including necessary improvements where school kitchens or dining areas are not suitable. Longer term we call again for universal free school meals and suggest that the forthcoming Scottish Food Commission should argue for this, along with promotion of the Living Wage. The Commission membership should include a trade union representative.

¹¹ <http://alofusfirst.org/resources/library/food-in-a-common-weal-scotland-2014/>

¹² www.scotland.org/features/scotland-a-fair-trade-nation/

¹³ www.unison-scotland.org.uk/response/20140630HealthInequalitiesinScotland.pdf

¹⁴ www.unison-scotland.org.uk/briefings/b041_BargainingBrief_Food4GoodCharter_Oct2013.pdf

¹⁵ www.unison-scotland.org.uk/news/2014/sep/oct/1001.htm

¹⁶ www.unison-scotland.org.uk/briefings/MSPe-briefing_FoodBill_Oct2014.pdf

¹⁷ <http://unison-scotland.blogspot.co.uk/2014/01/announcement-of-free-healthy-school.html#more>

Answers to the following questions from the Discussion Document

3. Do you agree with the proposed vision? How would you improve it?

We don't think it is realistic without tackling some of the economic and inequalities arguments around poverty highlighted above.

On page 20 about the journey to the vision, and a consensus on how to get there, the document states: "...healthy, sustainable and delicious food should be accessible to everyone." We would like to see that here and everywhere. A statement like that needs to be part of the vision, even if it is a long-term goal globally. Let's fit this with Scottish targets on tackling child poverty in particular and inequalities generally.

We find it strange to say the least that there is no mention in the document of poverty or inequality (other than a reference to the Healthy Living Programme, working with the industry to increase availability of healthier, affordable options in deprived areas, and community food hubs - like Lanarkshire Community Food and Health Partnership - and whether these should be significantly expanded), of Fair Trade, or of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. These gaps demonstrate the fact that there is not enough joined up thinking, embedding 'visionary' aims into the realities of Scotland now and the current issues that need to be addressed.

See our priority suggestions on our Food for Good Charter, the Living Wage, universal free school meals and food safety.

9. Do you agree with the proposed initial focus on:

- **Food in the public sector**
- **A children's food policy**
- **Local food**
- **Good food choices and**
- **Continued economic growth?**

Given the role public services can and should have in helping address inequalities issues, we believe they can play a strong part in these areas for an initial focus. Our Food for Good Charter (including references to children and food, local food and good choices via school lessons, awareness raising etc.) has strong proposals for food in the public sector and we welcome good examples of excellent work such as the Lanarkshire Community Food and Health Partnership and East Ayrshire council's Food for Life school food procurement programme (which contributes to the local economy, with every £1 invested returning £3 in social, economic and environmental value).

Climate change is addressed in this document and the procurement points we make above are particularly relevant. However, this should be linked with the public bodies duties of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009.

The good food choices part of the document acknowledges some issues around affordability of healthy options and class neutrality in messaging, but has nothing to say on the scale of or policies to address food poverty. We suggest that Ministers and the proposed Scottish Food Commission will have to take account of

poverty and related issues and should be looking to do so in part through relevant areas of the National Food and Drink Policy.

On continued economic growth, we believe that the emphasis must not be on growth at the expense of sustainability and we urge the adoption of sustainable development in this context, using the established definition with its five guiding principles already agreed by the Scottish Government and UK Government: living within environmental limits; ensuring a strong, healthy and just society; achieving a sustainable economy; promoting good governance and using sound science responsibly.

Also, food safety issues are essential for the public and for the reputation of the industry. On page 20 the document says the Scottish Government will “continue to operate world class food safety and surveillance systems.” Unless the points we have raised are addressed, that statement is incorrect.

10. Which other areas would you prioritise?

Among many good recommendations in the 2009 Walking the Talk report¹⁸ by Robin Gourlay, we agree in particular that the ‘whole life’ cost of food should be recognised, with “the balance between price and quality, and sustainable development, including costs attributable to health and climate change” acknowledged by purchaser and provider and factored into the business proposition.

11. What other steps toward achieving a Good Food Nation would you recommend?

Public bodies should be encouraged to make sustainable food procurement an explicit objective.

Conclusion

We recommend to Ministers our Food for Good Charter policies and food safety priorities and we suggest that the national food and drink policy should explicitly take account of poverty, including by supporting universal free school meals and promotion of the Living Wage.

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¹⁸ www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/291749/0089895.pdf