

Cross-Party Group on Food AGM

5 September 2023, 6pm, Committee Room 3 and Teams

Minute

Present

MSPs

Rhoda Grant MSP
Annie Wells MSP (virtually)
Jim Fairlie MSP
Colin Smyth MSP
Brian Whittle MSP

Non-MSP Group Members

In person

Kirsty Tinsdale	CPG Food Secretariat
Cat Hay	Food and Drink Federation Scotland
Jayne Jones	Argyll and Bute Council
Andrew Morrison	Food Standards Scotland
David Thomson	Food and Drink Federation Scotland
Eleonora Vanello	Scottish Council for Development and Industry
Mandy Morgan	The Scottish Pantry Network
Michelle McWilliams	The Rowett Institute, University of Aberdeen
Colin Smith	Scottish Wholesale Association
Sharon McWilliams	The Company Shop Group
Tilly Robinson-Miles	Food Train
Sarah Gowanlock	Soil Association Scotland
Pat Abel	Transition Edinburgh South

Virtually

Rosa Holt	Rosa Holt Dietitian
Peter Faassen de Heer	The Scottish Government
Liz Barron-Majerik	Lantra Scotland
Graeme Findlay	SQA
Vivien Collie	Vivid Ideas and Solutions
Gillian Purdon	Food Standards Scotland
Claire Hislop	Public Health Scotland
Jane Bunting Scotland	The Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland

Jennifer Forsyth	Obesity Action Scotland
David Harries	Food and Drink Federation Cymru
David Watts	Rowett Institute, University of Aberdeen
Fiona Bird	Isle of South Uist
Abi Mordin	Dumfries and Galloway Sustainable Food
Partnership	
Robert McGeachy	Food Standards Scotland
Martin Carle	Community Food Initiatives North East
Wendy Barrie	Scottish Food Guide
Bosse Dahlgren	Scottish Food Guide
David Mcbey	University of Aberdeen
Hamish Macdonell	Quality Meat Scotland
Lorna Dawson	James Hutton Institute
Simon Macdonald	Fisheries Aquaculture and Processing Consultant
Mary Brennan	University of Edinburgh
Laura Wilson	Food Standards Scotland
Joe Hind	Scotland Food & Drink
Mads Fischer-Moller	WWF Scotland
Gary Stephenson	Devro
Stephen Kelly	

1. Apologies

These were received from Mary Lawton, Marie-Amélie Viatte, Cate Devine, Keith Robson, Sandra Williamson, Lesley Stanley, Orchid Lui, Jackie McCabe, Martin Meteyard, Ruth Watson, Iain Clunie, Valerie Folco, Archie Gibson, Alistair Williams, Ceri Ritchie, Howell Davies, Jonathan Wilkin, Phil Thomas, Jacqueline Cunningham, Charlotte Maltin, Ann Packard, Eluned Michael.

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting (17 May 2023)

The minutes of the last meeting were proposed by David Thomson and seconded by Cat Hay and therefore approved and noted as a fair reflection of proceedings.

3. Matters Arising

Rhoda Grant MSP (RG) noted that the discussion from the last meeting on dietary health inequalities was very rich and relevant to the good food nation policy. This meeting and the next meeting (scheduled for Tuesday 28 November 2023) will have a Good Food Nation theme. RG advised that the Secretary will send the May CPG minutes, the September CPG minutes and the November CPG minutes (if timings work) to Scottish Government officials as part of the upcoming draft Good Food Nation national plan consultation.

4. Election of Co-Conveners and Secretariat

The following were elected:

Co-Conveners

Annie Wells (Conservative)
Rhoda Grant (Labour)
Jim Fairlie (SNP)

Secretariat

Kirsty Tinsdale, Food and Drink Federation Scotland

5. Good Food Nation: The economic opportunity

RG introduced the theme and thanked the speakers for joining us.

Cat Hay (CH), Head of Policy, Food and Drink Federation (FDF) Scotland

The key points from CH's presentation included:

- The FDF represents a diverse range of food and drink manufacturers.
- The sector is a vital part of the economy and to communities across Scotland, contributing over £10bn to the Scottish economy.
- Food and drink manufacturers are part of a larger ecosystem, working with packaging companies, farmers, exporter agencies, logistics companies, wholesalers, retailers and various others.
- FDF's membership realises the economic opportunity the policy could bring to businesses that are producing food and drink in Scotland if done right.
- For the manufacturers the Good Food Nation Plan should take cognisance of:
 - Ensuring high food standards are maintained – including quality, composition, labelling, presentation and advertising of food and drink
 - Authentic, safe food and drink
 - Affordable food
 - Supply chain fairness
 - Resilient and high food security to ensure we can feed our nation
- To become a good food nation we need governments to invest in the right infrastructure. To do this we need to make sure we are able to take our products to where they need to be at the right time and the right place. We need to be able to move goods in and out of the country in an effective and efficient way.
- Government support to de-risk innovation would be very welcome, particularly around the net zero sustainability agenda. This would allow businesses to trial things that will help to make their food more safe, more nutritious, healthier, and more sustainable.

- We need the right skills within our food and drink business and within the regulators. Ensuring that we have the right people with the right skills will ensure that:
 - Our food is what it says it is
 - The allergens in products are properly considered and correctly labelled
 - Food and drink business continue to adhere to the highest of standards

Andrew Morrison (AM), Head of Enforcement Delivery Branch, Food Standards Scotland (FSS)

The key points from AM's presentation included:

- The good food nation is a huge economic opportunity. But good food has to be safe food. Food has to be what it says it is, has to be appropriate labelled and has to be authentic.
- A proper, robust enforcement regulatory regime is a vital tool to underpin a healthy and thriving food industry.
- The majority of food regulation in Scotland is delivered by local government through their environmental health teams, but unfortunately environment health is facing some very significant challenges.
- There has been a rapid decline in officer numbers at local authorities for environmental health and food. Over the last five or six years there's been a 25% reduction in the number of officers delivering food controls in Scotland, and that's matched by a 21% decrease in the wider environmental health pool.
- FSS data projection shows that officer number will continue to decrease and that by 2036 there could be no people focused on food law in Scotland.
- This is partly caused by a rapidly ageing workforce.
- Food laws are delivered by two different types of officers - environmental health officers and food safety officers (who have specific food qualifications).
- As well as a decrease in officers, there is an increase in resource demand with a 21% increase in the number of food businesses on our Scottish national database.
- In addition, inspections now cover food standards and food safety which is 30% more resource intensive.
- Food is only one part of the wider environmental health function which is extensive and continues to grow. There is no realistic prospect of pulling staff from other areas in environment health into food.
- If we don't do anything, assurances in the food sector will start to drop.
- That would impact the ability to trade and gain access to export markets.
- In terms of public health, there could be risks around food borne outbreaks and problems with undeclared allergens.
- The decline in officers will place more pressure and stress on the staff that remain in post.
- It could also prevent FSS providing its statutory functions and damage the body's reputation.
- FSS is reviewing what makes an effective food law delivery service and has an ambition to deliver a reform programme. FSS has named this SAFER - which is the Scottish authorities food enforcement rebuild - this will deliver:

- The requisite degree of Public Health and Consumer Protection
 - The requisite degree of Food Business Assurance
 - An efficient, effective and targeted regime
 - A Food Law delivery model focused on risk and non-compliance
 - Sufficient, sustainable and dynamic resourcing
 - Alternative qualification pathways
 - Food Business Self Service
 - Vital training and practical guidance.
 - Technological and digital solutions.
- FSS want to find ways of bringing new people into the sector, giving the career path starting at a base level with basic authorisations and competencies and building on that until the officer is fully qualified.
 - At the moment everything is done by a highly qualified officer. There are aspects of food law that can be delivered by people with lower-level qualifications who could be trained on the job.
 - There is an additional issue with financial resources and how this work is funded needs to be considered. This will help make the system fit for the future.
 - FSS has ambitions to introduce a new digital system allowing end to end digital automating of most of the back-office functions.
 - Digital capture of intelligence that is gained at inspections will help allow FSS to see what's happening before it becomes a problem.
 - In terms of delivery FSS feel categorising establishments on a risk basis would work well, they want to move away from intervening in premises unless the intelligence shows a good reason to do so.
 - The use of self-assessments, third party assurance and sampling surveillance data is being considered as a way to give a picture of compliance and to ensure that the resource that is required is focused where it makes the most difference.
 - Alongside that, FSS want to introduce a new replacement food information scheme to replace the Food Hygiene Information scheme to drive forward compliance through public awareness of standards.

Jayne Jones (JJ), Senior Manager, Argyll and Bute Council

The key points from JJ's presentation included:

- Good Food Nation is an opportunity to deliver genuine, locally led but nationally deliverable food systems change.
- This is a generational opportunity for public sector food could and should be an exemplar of good practise and should be the key driver in delivering the big ambitions that the Good Food Nation Act contains.
- It is important to stop seeing public food as a budget line and as a cost to be managed down. Food is something that we should be invested in if we are to lead and deliver that transformational change that we wish to see through the Good Food Nation Act.
- At this moment in time when budgets are challenging, we can either take the short-term risk of cutting or even maintaining food budgets, which due to food inflation is in affect a cut. Or we can take a systems thinking view and see how public food delivers for a wide range of societal benefits.
- Local authorities and health boards need to be thinking about how they prioritise what will be coming around a good food nation, along the variety of other work that they are already delivering.
- It is important to think about how the good food nation plans all link together from the national plan through to health boards, public sector and local authority plans.
- It is important to avoid duplicating efforts and to look to the future around all of the national related work that's emerging around local food strategies such as right to food, climate change, ending the need for food banks.
- We need to highlight how food delivers for all of these policies and plans and make sure that that overlap is captured.
- The scope of the Good Food Nation Act is huge and could create that systems change that we need to see.
- Universal free school meals and meals for our early year's children are a huge opportunity to ensure that the money that we invest in public food delivers across this scope for multiple benefits so that we have food that is good for people, that's good for the planet and good for our communities.
- It is important to make sure that we're investing in that genuine community wealth building, investing in local jobs - both in our kitchens and also in our supply chain that includes primary producers and distribution – they are all part of the ecosystem of food for our local communities.
- We need to use food to close the attainment gap.
- Our children and young people will get a direct say in creating the good food nation plans. We need to really harness and build on that whole school approach to food where food is not just part of the curriculum but it's embedded as a tool for learning.
- We need to better showcase the wonderful job opportunities so our children and people know that they can remain in their communities and work in such an amazing industry.
- We have the opportunity to address health inequalities. Scotland already has really robust food and nutrition standards in our schools. We have this once in

a lifetime opportunity to improve and influence the eating habits of future generations.

- Public food is already delivering on animal welfare, buying ethically sourced food and less but good quality meat. There are programmes in place to support local authorities with these aims such as the Soil Association Food for Life standards.
- Food accounts for a third of global carbon emissions and we need to work to improve that.
- Argyll and Bute Council is looking at public procurement through the Scottish Organic Stakeholder Group, to get more sustainable, organic and climate friendly food into public food systems.
- We need to do more to encourage uptake of free school meals, it's only by eating the meals that we make a difference and then we also need to think about the mental health impact of food and not having food.
- It is important that right to food is enshrined in what we're doing and that cash first approaches are used as part of our overall strategy.
- Ultimately why wouldn't we want to provide the best food that we can afford to our children and young people, to our elderly and our care homes, and to our sick people recovering in hospital.

To note: Jayne Jones has moved roles and is now Assistant Director (Facilities and Production) at NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

The following was noted in the open debate:

- Brian Whittle MSP (BW) thought that we need to look at how the Good Food Nation Bill interacts with the agricultural bill and the land reform bill and that there's a need to take food security and food supply much more seriously than we have done in recent times.

Economy/growth

- BW noted that the empowering our food producers and protecting our food producers will be hugely important.
- Gary Stephenson (GS) (Devro) thought that to ensure continued economic success for the food and drink industry and wider economy Scotland needs to continue to be known for our high quality, great tasting food and drink.
- Mads Fischer-Moller (MF) (WWF Scotland) asked what the food summit – announced in the Scottish Government's Programme for Government - could deliver for the food and drink industry.
- CH said that FDF Scotland hopes that the food summit recognises that food and drink manufacturing is such a huge part of our food system and the event is genuinely inclusive – for large and small businesses.
- [The Scottish Wholesale Directory](#) has launched – which includes 95% of Scotland's wholesale food and drink distributors. The aim is to allow local producers to find the wholesaler that is the best fit to help them get the route to market.

Public procurement

- Tilly Robinson-Miles (TR) (Food Train) said it was important when we define public food to include services such as Meals on Wheels and provision when people leave hospital. She thought we need to consider how much money Scotland could save in preventing someone from becoming hospitalised again and also enable health and wellbeing, which is a key part of the Good Food Nation Act.
- Eleonora Vanello (Scottish Council for Development and Industry) wondered if there were any ideas to help smaller producers to gain access to local public procurement contracts.
- JJ thought that more needs to be done to promote the good work that public sector bodies are already doing. There's a huge amount of work underway to try and harness good practise and improve processes. A public sector procurement group has been established which is Co-chaired by assist FM, Sustainable Food Places, and Scotland Excel. At the first meeting of that group, all 32 local authorities either participated or had sent people along to understand a bit more. This showed a real drive and determination to improve the purchase and procurement of local food in Scotland.
- JJ advised some local authorities are already making public procurement simpler and more manageable for businesses. A project has started – funded by The Dixon Foundation - to do some mapping around determining whether dynamic procurement would be something that would work in Scotland. This could make the process easier for suppliers and allow for more seasonal produce.
- Colin Smith (CS) (Scottish Wholesale Association (SWA) thought public sector food is key to unlocking net zero foods chains and community wealth building. SWA - supported by Scottish Government – has developed a training and education programme to help local producers understand wholesale as a route to market. He thought it was important to look at how wholesalers can help small local producers get into wholesale, the local schools, the local hospitals, and grow at a rate that is right for them. But he considered that investment in the public sector is needed to ensure local suppliers are paid a fair price for their produce that enables them to grow and then to bring that price down, which then allows them to be on a par or potential par with all the food that we import from elsewhere in the world.

Skills and people

- GS wondered if the decline in environmental health officer roles were due to local authority cuts which was leading to roles not being available or whether it is due to the inability to fill the roles. He thought there were potentially two problems there - fewer roles for people to apply for and that the roles are being occupied by people who are heading towards retirement.
- AM said this is a combination of posts that have been disestablished with fewer posts within local government for food or enforcement but there are actually a large number of vacant posts. There are too few officers to fill the posts that are

available at any given time - authorities struggle to recruit and people often move around authorities from one role to another.

- TR thought that more could be done to raise the profile of these roles as an important career opportunity.
- AM highlight that there was an issue with the way in which the career services tagged environmental health officers as a career option on their systems. Previously these roles were tagged as business administration. That has been fixed, these roles will be of interest to people who would like careers in science and food and technology and not business administration.
- AM noted that budget cuts have not helped the situation, this led to the environmental health training level post being cut. Students were not interested in signing up to the environmental health degree because there wasn't the post to allow them to carry on their career. The underpinning course for food safety officers was discontinued a number of years ago and that curtailed people that would come in via that route. FSS is working with REHIS on new approaches.
- AM noted that environmental health roles suffer from an image problem due to TV shows like the Life of Grime. The food part of the role doesn't make as good entertainment and so there's not a lot of awareness of the variety of careers available. Other countries around the world face the same problems with recruitment.
- CH noted that food and drink businesses face similar images issues with perceptions people have of what it's like to work in the industry. There's also challenges around what's the best route to get the right people in – for example courses, qualifications or on the job training.

Regulation/technology

- GS welcomed the consideration of using third party assurance as a way to give a picture of compliance as a lot of larger businesses take part in third party audits several times a year and are therefore less likely to be as much of a risk.
- GS highlighted that lack of laboratory capacity for industry and regulators is a big issue.
- AM noted as well reduction in capacity in terms of access to labs for industry, the public analyst network use it for the samples for enforcement. As part of the restriction of budgets, local authority sampling has reduced. The use of sampling surveillance data could be a real useful tool in giving indications for where we want to be focusing our attention.
- CS asked about the use of barcodes to label our food and considered that these could be used to track food through the supply chain.
- AM thought that digital labelling could be part of the solution and help with prioritisation. But there's a lot to be considered around should it include additional information, could it include mandatory information but then how accessible is it to the consumer.

Education environment

- BW thought in schools we are trying to tackle attainment, mental health, physical health, behaviour in class, and hunger. He wondered why we aren't thinking about free school meals as breakfast and not doing things like creating

a sort of pre-school environment where young people take part in activities and food is available. This approach could help take away the stigma of free school food.

- JJ noted that the uptake of school meals has increased for the first time since 2016 – that data needs to be looked at in more detail to gain a better understanding on why that is.
- There was a debate on whether the home economics curriculum was outdated. Liz Barron-Majerik (Lantra Scotland) and GS wondered if the traditional elements of home economics such as sewing and crafts and food technology could be split apart more effectively so that young people can pick to do what they are interested in. AM agreed that food could be decoupled at school - it's a life skill and not a craft, this would help get people with the skills interested in working in the food industry or in enforcement.
- While Simon Macdonald (Fisheries Aquaculture and Processing Consultant) thought there should be more of a focus on how to prepare food, where food comes from, the health benefits of food, the importance of not wasting food and food hygiene best practice.
- JJ thought that some schools focus on food skills and food training and do that really well. It depends on what the priority around learning and teaching is in a particular school. She noted that Argyll and Bute used to run a children's friendly food hygiene training – it is worth considering whether this could be brought back.
- Graeme Findlay (SQA) thought that the teachers in schools do a really good job in preparing their pupils for life – this can include sewing, food education and money education. He thought perhaps home economics has an outdated name but the purpose of the course is still valid and is provided in the early years of their secondary education. He noted as students progress into more senior years there are courses in health and food technology and practical cookery and the option to complete a foundation apprenticeship in Food and Drink Technologies which was designed by industry. In addition, there is a Food Waste and Sustainability (SCQF level 5) unit available. He thought there is a lot of opportunities for partnership working between school and industry to help young people understand more about the food and drink industry.

Sustainability

- MF wondered when talking about growth, how much is sustainability and net zero part of that and how does that meet what consumers want.
- CH noted that what our end consumers do versus what they say they do is quite varied and we still have a huge problem with food waste in this country. She said that the retailers – who our manufacturers supply - are more focused on this with the net zero agenda rising up the agenda. Tesco has set targets to reduce absolute Scope 1 and 2 emissions from its own operations by 85% by 2030, absolute Scope 3 emissions from energy and industrial sources by 55% by 2032, and absolute Scope 3 emissions from forests, land and agriculture emissions by 39% by 2032.
- BW highlighted the UN's stat that shows if global food waste was a country, it would be the third biggest emitter of carbon dioxide in the world after China and the US. He thought we need to look both as individuals and as councils and

governments at how we use food and how we ensure that we throw away less food. He said it is a precious commodity that we can't afford to waste and should be part of what we do in the Good Food Nation Bill.

- JJ said that food waste is a huge issue - not just around what we do with it but how we use it, how we repurpose it, how we classify food waste, and there's a need to decouple the issues around repurposing food and food waste as a means of tackling poverty.
- CH highlighted that vegetable peelings, shells and bones are not fit for human consumption but could be categorised as food waste. She thought food waste data in Scotland could be improved – this is important to understand what food waste we have and which of this could be used.
- CH noted that the Competition Markets Authority are looking at how a business claims a product is eco-friendly or sustainable – she thought there could be a lot more of those claims being openly challenged in the future.
- CH highlighted a lot of work is happening on how to best measure net zero and sustainability in the food and drink industry.
- GS noted that scope one is carbon you emit by burning fossil fuels and scope two is the carbon emitted to generate electricity – these are often fairly easy to measure and therefore easier to do something about. He thought that the challenge for the whole industry is scope three carbon emissions which is all the carbon that's embedded in a business' supply chain - this is dependent on third parties which gets more difficult because it's beyond your control. He said that measures are being put in place that require investors to make sure that they invest in sustainable businesses which pushed a lot of industries down that sustainability track. He highlighted there are internal carbon price tools that can help with the economics of decarbonising production but how a business get accurate figures from the rest of their supply chain will be a big challenge over the next 5 to 10 years.

6. AOB

There was no other business raised.

7. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 28 November 2023 at 6pm at the Scottish Parliament. There will also be an option to join online via Teams.