



**UNISON Scotland response:  
Scottish Government Consultation on Good  
Food Nation Proposals for Legislation**

**April 2019**

**Introduction**

UNISON is Scotland's largest trade union with members across the public, private and voluntary sectors. A considerable number work in areas directly 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 related areas in the NHS, social care and in educational settings, including schools, colleges and universities, as well as those working in procurement and environmental health. All our members, of course, have an interest in food and health and education, in tackling food poverty, climate change and improving workers' rights throughout the food system.

We welcome the opportunity to take part in this consultation. We have contributed to and endorse the consultation response from the Scottish Food Coalition.<sup>1</sup> Our answers to the specific questions are the SFC answers.

**General overview**

UNISON has long campaigned on the wide-ranging agenda summarised in the Scottish Food Coalition (SFC) call for a socially and environmentally just food system.<sup>2</sup> As noted in our response in 2014 to the Scottish Government consultation on 'Becoming a Good Food Nation', we say that it makes absolute sense to have a cross cutting food policy. Our long-running Food for Good campaign, due to be updated this year, includes a Charter<sup>3</sup> calling 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.

The Food for Good Charter covers a range of policy areas as they affect food, including climate change, sustainable development, health, education, transport, public procurement, food labelling, animal welfare and local sourcing of food.

We said in 2014, and we repeat in this response, that priority areas for us are tackling inequalities, food poverty, extending the real Living Wage, and food safety.

It is absolutely unacceptable that so many families in Scotland in 2019 need to rely on food banks, with the latest figures showing that hundreds of thousands of Scottish families cannot afford healthy food. The Guardian reported last month that nearly half a million food parcels were handed out by the Trussell Trust and independent food banks in Scotland between April 2017 and September 2018. Trussell Trust

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.foodcoalition.scot/uploads/6/2/6/8/62689573/final\\_submitted\\_sfc\\_consultation\\_response.pdf](http://www.foodcoalition.scot/uploads/6/2/6/8/62689573/final_submitted_sfc_consultation_response.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.foodcoalition.scot/uploads/6/2/6/8/62689573/plenty\\_complete.pdf](http://www.foodcoalition.scot/uploads/6/2/6/8/62689573/plenty_complete.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/briefings/b041\\_BargainingBrief\\_Food4GoodCharter\\_Oct2013.pdf](http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/briefings/b041_BargainingBrief_Food4GoodCharter_Oct2013.pdf)

figures showed a 15% increase in food bank use year on year “linked directly to the rollout of Universal Credit.”<sup>4</sup>

Even before such shocking increases in food poverty, we argued for universal free school meals and again we repeat that call. Hungry children cannot learn well, with impacts on health, on education and on their life chances. Policy has to be cross cutting to ensure joined up thinking and strategies. Economic policy and social security policy are clearly integral to our ambitions on food issues across the spectrum. Austerity declares deliberate, cruel, targeted economic war on the most vulnerable, with, at the extreme, appalling cases of people denied benefits going so hungry they are quite literally starving.

Austerity cuts to public services lead to cuts to funding for school meals, for hospital food, for environmental health inspections (with consequent impacts on food safety), and for services to support vulnerable people.

We will not labour this point in our response, nor detail the mountains of evidence of the damage being done, but it is our experience of and knowledge of these shameful developments in one of the world’s richest countries that inform our demands for a socially and environmentally just food system.

We believe that achieving the Good Food Nation vision, including that everyone in Scotland has ready access to the healthy, nutritious food that they need, has to incorporate the measures on pay and collective bargaining proposed by the Scottish Food Coalition. This means a robust target on the face of the Bill for all workers in the food sector to be paid at least the living wage and included in collective bargaining agreements by 2025 at the latest. Food sector jobs are often some of the most insecure and poorly paid. Any Good Food Nation ambitions must have a strategy to address this and we support the detailed response on this from our sister union Unite, also a member of the SFC.

We also applaud the response from the Scottish Human Rights Commission<sup>5</sup>, which argues, as the SFC does, for the full incorporation of the right to food in Scots law. In its evidence, the Commission cites rising food insecurity and the impacts of Brexit as reasons for putting the human right to food into law. It refers to the importance, in the implementation of the right to food, of policy coherence “across a diverse range of portfolios in health, the environment, social justice, education and the economy.”

Full incorporation would also be consistent with government commitments and ambitions with regard to the National Outcomes, Sustainable Development Goals and in demonstrating human rights leadership.

On climate change, we note the need for urgent action emphasised by the 2018 IPCC report on limiting global warming to a 1.5C temperature rise above pre-industrial levels. Around a quarter of Scottish greenhouse gas emissions come from agriculture and related land use, with further emissions from the food sector in the processing, sale and waste of food. It is essential that this is tackled urgently, with

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/mar/27/desperate-food-poverty-rises-by-15-in-scotland-shows-data>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.scottishhumanrights.com/news/change-the-law-to-protect-the-right-to-food-for-all/>

policy coherence. The Bill has a clear role to play in this. We believe that duties on public bodies and the use of public procurement, such as we have long argued for in our Food for Good Charter, are key.

The Scottish Food Coalition makes clear that the legislation is necessary to address multiple problems in a broken food system, including food poverty, public health – including the impacts of high levels of obesity, climate change, wildlife declines, problems with animal welfare and the difficulties experienced by rural communities, as well as the jobs issues of insecurity, low pay, precarious contracts and forced labour.

We support the SFC priorities for Good Food Nation legislation. These are:

1. Full incorporation of the **right to food** in Scots law;
2. A requirement for a comprehensive **National Food Plan**, which covers the full spectrum of issues related to food, from farm to fork to waste;
3. Robust **targets** on the face of the bill, including:
  - a. All workers in the food sector paid at least the living wage and included in collective bargaining agreements by 2025 at the latest.
  - b. Halving of moderate to severe household food insecurity by 2030
  - c. Halving childhood obesity by 2030
  - d. Halving the environmental impact of the food system, including halving food waste by 2030
4. **Duties** on public bodies; and,
5. Legislating for an **independent food commission**, with the power and resources to commission research, and oversee policy coherence and progress towards food system goals.

QUESTIONS:

**1. To what extent do you agree with the framework proposals for Ministers and public authorities to 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?**

Agree: Please see the SFC response<sup>6</sup> which we endorse, for strong recommendations on improving this.

**2. Whilst we do not plan to require all sectors to prepare statements of policy on food, they do all have a role to play in achieving our Good Food Nation ambition. To what extent do you agree that Government should encourage and enable businesses in particular to play their part?**

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.foodcoalition.scot/uploads/6/2/6/8/62689573/final\\_submitted\\_sfc\\_consultation\\_response.pdf](http://www.foodcoalition.scot/uploads/6/2/6/8/62689573/final_submitted_sfc_consultation_response.pdf)

Strongly agree: Please see the SFC response for details.

**3. To what extent do you agree with the proposed approach to accountability of Scottish Ministers and specified public authorities?**

Strongly disagree: Please see the SFC response for details of our call for a statutory, independent Food Commission.

**4. To what extent do you agree with the proposal for targeted legislation relevant to specific policy areas as an alternative to a single piece of legislation?**

Strongly disagree: Please see the SFC response for details of why a framework Bill is essential, while secondary or targeted legislation will also be necessary.

**Conclusion**

Using legislation to work towards a truly Good Food Nation is a healthy direction of travel, not only in terms of the health of our people, particularly our children and young people, but the health of the economy and the planet. We urge the Scottish Government to bring forward a Bill which is truly cross cutting and that delivers on the SFC priorities. A menu for real, healthy change.

**For further information, please contact:**

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