

Scotland's  
Futures  
Forum



Scotland's Futures Forum  
Fòram Alba air Thoiseach

# THE FUTURE OF FOOD IN SCOTLAND

Event report



## **Introduction**

On Monday 8 December 2025, Scotland's Futures Forum and the Living Good Food Nation Lab hosted an in-person event at the Scottish Parliament. Around 40 participants attended from across the food system, including representatives from farming, fishing, public health, education, policy, business and community organisations. The session ran from late afternoon into the evening and included a light supper showcasing locally sourced produce, reinforcing the themes under discussion.

The event was designed to explore a central question: what do we want Scotland's food system to look like in 2050, and what actions are needed now to help get there. It built on ongoing work around the Good Food Nation agenda and created space for open, cross-sector discussion about long-term change.

The format combined short keynote inputs with structured discussion. The intention was not to reach consensus, but to surface different perspectives, tensions and emerging themes that can inform future policy and parliamentary scrutiny.

## **Setting the Scene**

The session opened with remarks from Mary Brennan, who invited participants to think beyond immediate policy cycles and consider deeper shifts in how food is produced, valued and experienced. The framing question was deliberately future-focused, encouraging participants to reflect on both ambition and practicality.

An early icebreaker asked participants to consider what their ancestors ate, what they eat now, and what future generations might eat. This simple exercise grounded the discussion in lived experience and highlighted how dramatically food systems can change over time. It also helped open up thinking about what kinds of change are possible, and what might feel unfamiliar or challenging in the future.

## Keynote contributions

A series of short keynote talks helped to frame the discussion from different angles.

Professor Baukje de Roos focused on what Scotland currently produces and why, drawing attention to the relationship between land use, economics and dietary patterns. The point was made that what is produced does not always align with what is consumed, and that future choices about production will have significant implications for health and sustainability.

Jayne Jones spoke about “the public plate”, highlighting the scale and influence of public sector catering. Schools, hospitals and other public services serve a large proportion of meals across Scotland, and this creates a major opportunity to shape diets, support local producers and improve health outcomes if used more strategically.

Dr Kelly Parsons explored how food policy is currently made, and the challenges of fragmentation across different policy areas. She emphasised the need for more integrated, systems-based approaches, as well as clearer governance structures to support long-term change.

Diana Garduño Jiménez brought an international perspective, focusing on how power operates within food systems. Her contribution highlighted that decisions about food are not neutral, and that issues of ownership, influence and control play a major role in shaping outcomes.

Pamela Murray and Wendy Handley discussed their whole systems approach to food in Forth Valley prisons, which focuses on creating health improvement opportunities within prison and the justice system. They discussed how food can be used as a means for education and employment, as well as how food environments can be changed dramatically to encourage healthy eating.

## Themes emerging from discussion

Across both the keynote inputs and group discussions, several themes came through strongly.

There was a clear sense that Scotland's food system is under increasing pressure. Climate change, biodiversity loss and global instability are already affecting production and supply chains. Participants spoke about more frequent extreme weather, shifting growing conditions and the vulnerability of marine ecosystems. These pressures are expected to intensify in the coming decades.

At the same time, there was recognition that the system is not currently delivering equitable outcomes. Access to healthy food remains uneven, and diet-related health issues continue to follow clear social gradients. Many participants felt that without deliberate intervention, these inequalities are likely to widen.

Another recurring theme was the disconnect between production and consumption. Scotland produces significant amounts of high-quality food, much of which is exported, while domestic diets often rely heavily on imported and processed products. This raises questions about resilience, affordability and cultural identity.

Participants also reflected on the role of technology. While innovation offers potential benefits, particularly in improving efficiency and reducing waste, there was concern that it may favour larger businesses and accelerate consolidation. This could have implications for rural employment, land use and local economies.

The importance of culture and behaviour was emphasised throughout. Food is not just about nutrition or economics, but also about identity, tradition and social connection. Several participants highlighted the loss of shared eating spaces and skills, and the potential benefits of rebuilding these as part of a healthier food system.

Finally, there was strong agreement that governance structures need to evolve. Food policy currently sits across multiple portfolios, making coordination difficult. Participants questioned whether existing parliamentary and government structures are well suited to addressing such a cross-cutting issue.

## **Implications for committees**

One of the workshop tasks allocated different groups to different Good Food Nation outcomes, which in turn linked to different parliamentary committees. As a result of these workshop discussions, there were some clear themes and issues for the differing committee's consideration.

### **Net Zero, Energy & Transport Committee**

#### **Key Themes**

##### **Climate Impacts on Food Systems**

- Increasing climate extremes are already reducing land productivity and increasing risk of food system instability and potential societal disruption.
- Warmer, wetter conditions may enable some novel crops, but also increase pests, disease, and unpredictability.
- Ocean warming threatens marine food chains; depopulation of rural/coastal areas likely due to climate, workforce shortages, and lower sector appeal.

##### **Technology & Emissions**

- Green technologies alone cannot offset severe climate impacts.
- Precision agriculture and automation favour larger farms, reducing employment and accelerating consolidation.
- Renewable energy expansion increases competition for land and marine space.
- AI may improve efficiencies (e.g. food waste reduction, logistics) but risks widening inequalities.

##### **Issues for the Committee**

- Adaptation funding and the resilience of Scottish agriculture.
- Land-use competition: balancing climate targets with food production and biodiversity.
- Ensuring technological innovation benefits SMEs, not only large agribusinesses.
- Monitoring GHG emissions from changing diets, food waste, and supply chains.

# **Rural Affairs & Islands Committee**

## **Key Themes**

### **Agriculture, Land Use & Rural Viability**

- Declining resilience of traditional farming systems; risk of fewer Scottish farmers.
- Shifts in viable crops between east and west coasts; uneven access to technology and economics across regions.
- Crofting may become more attractive for self-sufficiency but remains labour-intensive.
- Partnerships and cooperatives (e.g. French-style processing hubs) may be vital to future localised food systems.

### **Subsidies & Public Money**

- Area-based payments and regionalised subsidies seen as crucial levers.
- Need for stability, long-term planning, and alignment across government departments.
- Public procurement highlighted as a major tool for supporting domestic production—though not sufficient on its own.

### **Rural Depopulation & Workforce**

- Extreme weather and low sector confidence deter workforce recruitment.
- Modernisation may reduce jobs but free time for food-related life skills if managed well.

### **Issues for the Committee**

- Re-shaping agricultural support around “public money for public goods”.
- Supporting diverse local production, infrastructure, and processing capacity.
- Ensuring remote/rural authorities are empowered and adequately resourced for GFN plans.
- Addressing consolidation of land ownership and access barriers.

# Health, Social Care & Sport Committee

## Key Themes

### Diet, Health Inequalities & Behavioural Change

- Major concern about widening inequalities in healthy eating and life expectancy by 2050.
- Weight-loss pharmaceuticals (“food noise dampeners”) may suppress enjoyment of food, drive dependency, and exacerbate fat-phobic narratives.
- UPF (ultra-processed food) consumption likely to rise without strong regulation.
- Mental health and food anxiety expected to worsen with climate disruptions and atomised communities.

### Public Health Measures

- Calls for holistic health framing (physical, mental, cultural, economic).
- Need for healthier food environments, consistent regulation, and potentially more radical steps (compared to smoking legislation) to shift norms.
- Universal school meals with proper kitchens seen as a cornerstone of future health equity.

### Issues for the Committee

- Integrating food, wellbeing, and social health into a cohesive policy approach.
- Regulation of UPFs and marketing, especially to young people.
- Long-term strategy for weight-loss drugs: clinical, social, and regulatory considerations.
- Ensuring the GFN local plans address food poverty and community infrastructure for eating together.

# Local Government, Housing & Planning Committee

## Key Themes

### Local Plans & Governance

- Strong consensus that **2028 local GFN plans** require:
  - significant resourcing
  - clear criteria
  - long-term funding
  - cross-departmental alignment
- Local authorities central to enabling healthier food environments (planning powers, retail mix, community food spaces).

### Complexity and Scrutiny

- Current parliamentary and committee structures may not fully support cross-cutting scrutiny of the food system.
- Stakeholders questioned whether new committee structures or joint MSP groups are needed (as in Westminster).
- Lack of shared baseline data makes scrutiny difficult.

### Community Infrastructure

- Community dining, social care spaces, and public kitchens highlighted as key to food culture and reducing loneliness and diet-related disease.

### Issues for the Committee

- Ensuring LAs have capacity to deliver transformative food environments.
- Addressing inequalities between localities (e.g. Shetland vs urban authorities).
- Oversight of planning legislation to integrate food as core infrastructure, not a niche issue.

## **Economy & Fair Work Committee**

### **Key Themes**

#### **Business Confidence & Market Resilience**

- Low business confidence due to climate, supply chain volatility, and uncertainty over policy direction.
- SMEs risk being left behind due to limited access to capital for new technologies.
- Consolidation of processing and wholesale over the last 15 years threatens diversity and resilience.

#### **Global vs Local Tensions**

- Pressure to export high-value Scottish produce may increase inequalities between local food cultures and tourist-facing food narratives.
- Corporations' increasing power could undermine community food priorities and workforce wellbeing.

#### **Employment & Skills**

- Technology may reduce employment in primary production; hospitality and food manufacturing need better-quality jobs (pay, hours, dignity).
- Need to bolster Scotland's food processing sector to retain value locally.

#### **Issues for the Committee**

- Strategies to reduce corporate influence and support small businesses.
- Examining whether GFN levers sufficiently include businesses (beyond procurement).
- Ensuring triple-bottom-line accounting (social, environmental, economic) becomes standard practice.
- Supporting future workforce planning and high-quality jobs in food production.

# **Education, Children & Young People Committee**

## **Key Themes**

### **Food Education & Life Skills**

- Universal belief that long-term cultural change requires embedding food education in schools:
  - cooking
  - understanding the food system
  - environmental impacts
  - cultural value of food
- Schools must have kitchen facilities; food should be seen as core learning, not an add-on.

### **Children's Health & Inequality**

- Rising childhood obesity and dental health challenges anticipated without intervention.
- Strong support for universal school meals and eating together daily.

### **Social Value & Children's Environments**

- Need for regulated and supportive food environments around schools (planning, retail, advertising).

### **Issues for the Committee**

- Oversight of curriculum development for holistic food literacy.
- Ensuring all schools have funding and facilities for cooking and proper meal provision.
- Mitigating corporate marketing influences on children.

# Constitution, Europe, External Affairs & Culture Committee

## Key Themes

### International Reputation & Cultural Identity

- Outcome 6 emphasises Scotland's global leadership in sustainable food.
- However, risk noted that “food tourism” narratives may diverge from the reality of everyday diets.
- Opportunities in:
  - exporting best practice
  - building international partnerships
  - showcasing biodiversity, locality, and tradition.

### External Pressures

- Global supply chain volatility, increased imports, and climate-driven migration may reshape food availability and cultural norms.

### Issues for the Committee

- Maintaining policy coherence between international branding and domestic food equity.
- Ensuring international trade supports, not undermines, local resilience.
- Sharing and learning from global best practice in governance and food systems.

### Cross-Cutting Recommendations for All Committees

- Stronger, clearer, long-term legislation to align demand and supply.
- Baseline national data to enable scrutiny and consistency.
- Public money for public goods as a guiding economic principle.
- Investment in local processing and shorter supply chains.
- Prioritising equity to counter widening inequalities.
- Integration of climate, health, and economic goals into a single, whole-system approach.