



UNISON Scotland: consultation on the proposed Right to Food (Scotland) Bill

September 2020

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. During the COVID-19 pandemic, local government, housing associations and the voluntary sector have played a crucial role in feeding the most vulnerable people in local communities.

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.

General overview

UNISON has long campaigned for a cross cutting food policy and for a socially and environmentally just food system and is an active member of the Scottish Food Coalition (SFC).¹ Our Food for Good Charter², due to be updated this year, 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. UNISON's long-running Food for Good campaign includes a Charter 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.

In our submission to the Scottish Government's Good Food Nation consultation³ we strongly supported the incorporation of the Right to Food into Scots law alongside the Scottish Food Coalition and the Scottish Human Rights Commission. We therefore welcome, and are fully supportive of the proposed Bill.

Key points

Along with the Scottish Food Coalition, UNISON has been a strong advocate of an independent Food Commission and strongly supports the proposal to create an independent statutory body to monitor progress in meeting the right to food and hold government accountable. A Food Commission would be

¹ <http://www.foodcoalition.scot/>

² <https://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/foodforgood/2013FoodforGoodCharter.pdf>

³ <https://consult.gov.scot/food-and-drink/good-food-nation/>

able to commission research, make recommendations to government, and engage with civil society networks.

We agree that framework legislation is needed, in recognition of the very wide range of government departments and public agencies which have a role in ensuring that everyone is able to access nutritious, healthy and sustainable food. The independent Food Commission would have an important role to play in supporting alignment of other targeted bills within the framework legislation. NHS Health Scotland (2018) has emphasised the importance of preventing food poverty, and of addressing the structural causes:

“...the unequal distribution of income, power and wealth – will need to be tackled, alongside engaging those facing food poverty. We should also take a human-rights based approach. This is about making sure that people’s rights are put at the very centre of policies and practices.”⁴

UNISON supports this approach. Framework legislation would enable the structural causes of hunger and malnutrition in a wealthy nation like Scotland to be addressed, such as low pay, race and sex inequality, and our inadequate benefits system.

The consultation paper asks about the financial implications of the proposed bill. There would be costs involved in establishing a Food Commission. However the Scottish Food Coalition has produced a strong justification for these in terms of achieving cross cutting collaboration, oversight and coordination instead of the current incoherent and fractured landscape.⁵ We also need to take a broader view of costs. One major cost of the current, broken, food system is its contribution to climate change. Around a quarter of Scottish greenhouse gas emissions come from agriculture and related land use. In our submission to the Good Food Nation consultation we emphasised the important role of public procurement in tackling emissions from the food sector in the processing, sale and waste of food. Legislating the right to food into Scots law is not in itself enough. An independent Food Commission is vital for making sure there is proper national oversight and coordination to encourage change and move things in the right direction, through duties on public bodies and the use of public procurement to buy local.

UNISON strongly welcomes the proposed legislation.

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⁴ <http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/2222/food-poverty.pdf>

⁵ http://www.foodcoalition.scot/uploads/6/2/6/8/62689573/sfc_consultation_response.pdf