

Good Food Nation Bill Consultation: TVS Response

Consultation 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

The Vegan Society believes that the Good Food Nation Bill legislation will be an effective way to achieve some of the admirable aims that have been proposed for Scotland, especially around access to healthy, nutritious food, environmental sustainability and the avoidance of public health crises. A joined-up approach from government and public bodies is vitally important; this is why legislation is crucial to underpin the strategy to achieve these targets.

There are many problems with the current food system in the UK and in Scotland specifically, some of which we will highlight here.

Vegans face challenges in accessing healthy, nutritious food in public bodies like schools and hospitals. Last year Go Vegan Scotland released the results of a survey into state vegan provision in Scotland. This revealed many failings, including hospital patients going hungry, patients discharging themselves early to get something nutritious to eat at home and primary school children missing out on free school meals. The state is currently failing these citizens as they are being denied access to food in line with their protected ethical beliefs, despite veganism being a protected belief under Human Rights and Equality legislation in the UK. There are over 600,000 vegans in the UK – a number which has quadrupled in the past four years and is continuing to grow.

Scotland has the highest obesity rates of any country in the UK and the total annual cost to the Scottish economy is up to £4.6 billion annually. Scottish citizens are falling woefully short of meeting their daily target of 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day, with an average of around 3.2 portions per day, according to the National Diet and Nutrition Survey. Vegan diets are typically high in fruit and vegetables, meaning less saturated fat and plenty of dietary fibre. Research has linked vegan diets with lower blood pressure and cholesterol, as well as lower rates of heart disease, type-2 diabetes and some types of cancer. Encouraging well-planned plant-based diets can have a significant positive impact on Scotland's public health and go some way to ensuring that dietary-related diseases are in decline.

The Scottish government has made some ambitious climate change commitments in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, committing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 90% by 2050. It is vitally important that decisive action is taken immediately as the United Nations'

IPCC report advises we have only until 2030 to avert catastrophic global temperature increases and Harvard research indicates that it is impossible to meet climate targets without drastically reducing food-related emissions.

Switching to a plant-based diet is 'the single biggest way' of lessening an individual's impact upon the Earth, according to researchers at Oxford University. The Good Food Nation bill legislation, Ministers and public authorities should bear this in mind when adopting secondary legislation, as encouraging people to switch to a vegan diet is one of the best ways of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

We agree that the proposed framework of Ministers and public authorities preparing statements of policy and reporting on implementation would be a good first step in the process to achieving the aims of the bill. We do, however, feel that specific legislation should be enacted in key areas, which would provide the framework for achieving these goals.

- Legislation to guarantee vegan food options on all public sector menus

Offering more vegan dishes on public sector menus doesn't just protect the legal rights of vegans, it also offers wider benefits to public health and the environment. Offering more vegan food is an inclusive choice as it can be eaten by people from all walks of life, including vegetarians and those looking to reduce their animal product consumption for health or environmental reasons. It is also straightforward to make vegan dishes suitable for people with religious dietary requirements, including people who follow the Islamic, Jewish, Hindu and Sikh faiths. Because vegan food covers so many diverse requirements, and the ingredients usually cost less than animal products, institutions can also benefit from savings by offering more vegan food on their menus. The public sector can lead the way in setting a good example of healthy, sustainable food being served to the public. Increasing exposure and accessibility to plant-based food will help to shift public understanding of what is healthy and sustainable, ensuring that targets around greenhouse gas and dietary-related diseases are met.

- Land management / agricultural reform

The Vegan Society has a vision for land management in Scotland that could ensure a vibrant Scottish ecology and economy. We would like to see greater education around the environmental and economic benefits of protein crop production. For example, beans, peas and other leguminous protein crops take nitrogen from the air and store it in their roots, ensuring the soil quality doesn't diminish. We would also like subsidies directed more towards protein crops to help the transition to a sustainable food system. Additionally, we advise designated funding for market research and development for future protein crops. We call for the use of Climate Finance to support rewilding for land that cannot be used for crop farming

and a package of support for farmers who are willing to transition away from animal agriculture and the negative impact it brings.

There are many potential opportunities for Scottish protein crops to flourish and benefit the Scottish economy. Oats could be used to create a Scottish oat milk rival to Sweden's Oatly. Hemp can be grown for food, oil and fibre and specialist crops such as mushrooms, herbs and spices offer good margins. Scottish hops and barley can also enhance Scottish beer.

Tree-farming or 'agro-forestry' could greatly aid Scotland. Much of Scotland would naturally be mature woodland but today 80% of Scotland is unwooded. Re-forestation will help connect with its heritage, whilst also being a valuable tool for carbon sequestration. Agro-forestry can provide good livelihoods, many renewable resources, sustainable tourism and animal habitats, as well as yielding healthy food.

Key performance indicators for the legislation could be the measure of certain public health and environmental targets, i.e. dietary-related diseases amongst the population, and greenhouse gas emission targets.

- 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?**
STRONGLY AGREE

Whilst the public sector has a vitally important role to play in setting standards and leading by example, it is clear that to achieve the aims of the legislation, all sectors, including businesses and private sector will need to make changes.

We think that the Scottish Government should dedicate a significant amount of resources to encouraging and enabling businesses and other sectors to meet the same standards that the public sector will be achieving.

The healthiest and most sustainable products should be the most affordable whilst the least healthy and sustainable products should be more expensive. This will encourage better public health and environmental outcomes.

The government should seek to make lightly processed fruit and vegetables the most affordable food products available with unhealthy processed meats and unsustainable meat products being the most expensive. This will account for the externalities associated with those products.

There is a lot of evidence that poorer families are forced to buy cheap 'junk' food, often heavily processed meat products containing high saturated fat, salt and sugar, due to these products being significantly cheaper than

healthier alternatives. This is no doubt a driver of the many dietary-related public health crises like heart disease, type-2 diabetes, obesity and certain cancers. Ensuring that healthy, nutritious fruit, vegetables and other plant-based products sold in any sector are affordable for everyone, should be a top priority for the legislation.

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

AGREE

We think the proposed approach to accountability is acceptable, provided all relevant public authorities and Ministers have responsibility under the legislation. It is important that, for example, the Ministers for Education, Equalities, Public Health, Rural Affairs & Natural Environment, are all held accountable for progress in their departments. This is especially relevant when considered in a vegan context. As vegans are currently being unfairly discriminated against by being denied access to suitable food in the public sector, for instance in hospitals, we would like to see the Minister for Equalities being responsible under the Good Food Nation Bill for ensuring that this situation is rectified.

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 AGREE

We believe that targeted legislation relevant to specific policy areas would work better than a single piece of legislation as it allows some flexibility and to address some vitally important areas more directly, e.g. legislation to guarantee vegan food options on all public sector menus & Land management / agricultural reform.