

FOOD SYSTEMS DIALOGUES (FSDs)

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CO-ORGANIZED BY

THE GLOBAL ACADEMY OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY AND THE
FOOD RESEARCHERS IN EDINBURGH

SUMMARY REPORT*

Executive Summary	2
Proposals	3
Proposal 1: Connect producers at a local level with national policy-making	3
Proposal 2: Reduce the stigma associated with ‘holiday hunger’	4
Proposal 3: Agree on a systems-based definition of sustainably-produced food	4
Proposal 4: Build on progress made with the Good Food Nation Bill	4
Proposal 5: Transform practices in the livestock sector to improve environmental outcomes	5
Proposal 6: Remove incentives in supermarkets which promote over-consumption and unhealthy food	5
Proposal 7: Improve the traceability of supply chains	6
Proposal 8: Create a safe space for supermarkets to participate in change	6
Proposal 9: Develop a city-level carbon footprinting and auditing tool	7
Proposal 10: Create supporting structures to help actors change	8
Proposal 11: Establish a definition of ‘decent standard of living’ for food sector workers	8
Proposal 12: Empower food sector workers through education and collective structures	9
Proposal 13: Conduct a landscape review and a survey of food sector workers	9
Proposal 14: Leverage procurement processes to support local businesses	9
Comments from the FSDs Curator	10

*The format of FSDs Summary Reports is under development. This report may be subject to change

Executive Summary

On 30 January 2020 a Food Systems Dialogues (FSDs) event took place in Edinburgh, Scotland, co-organized by the University of Edinburgh, Global Academy of Agriculture and Food Security, Food Researchers in Edinburgh and Centre for Security Research. Approximately 50 participants attended, reflecting a range of actors working in Food Systems, including academics, researchers, representatives of NHS Scotland, the Scottish Parliament, the Soil Association, IIED, Nourish, Dignity in Practice, Action on Sugar, other land, food and nutrition advocacy organizations, UNICEF, and others.

Each FSDs table is asked to explore an issue and to propose actions that can be realistically initiated in the next three years that will have the greatest possible impact on collective efforts in relation to the issue.

The discussion topics at this event addressed the following areas:

- No child in Scotland suffers from undernutrition or micronutrient deficiencies or 'holiday hunger' as a result of food insecurity;
- Farmers and food producers in Scotland are able to make a living from producing sustainable, nutritious and affordable food;
- Supermarkets play their part in tackling overconsumption, undernutrition and the incidence of NCDs such as obesity;
- Edinburgh reduces her carbon footprint from food consumption as a city;
- Food sector workers in Edinburgh, Scotland, have decent work and can afford an adequate standard of living.

Each discussion topic is shown in the report below, followed by the proposal(s) which emerged in response to that topic. Discussion topics are phrased as ambitious 'ideal future states' of food systems.

The following is a summary of the tables' proposals for food systems transformation as well as the discussions that led them to their conclusions.

As is the norm at FSDs events, all proposals outlined in this Summary Report are not attributed to any particular individual or organization. Each proposal did not necessarily receive universal support from all participants at the event; rather, the aim of this report is to capture recommendations made at the event, in order to allow continuity and consensus - a 'red thread' - to emerge across all FSDs events.

Proposals

FSDs Discussion topic: 'No child in Scotland suffers from undernutrition or micronutrient deficiencies or 'holiday hunger' as a result of food insecurity.'

Proposal 1: Connect producers at a local level with national policy-making

To address the problem of malnutrition, it is critical to take a systems approach, with specific emphasis on listening to the people involved in nutrition. This entails making sure that local voices are heard and that initiatives are community-driven. When it comes to 'holiday hunger', children's parents and families, as well as school services, GPs and police should be able to contribute to the discussion.

These local voices need to be connected to school systems and to national-level policy-makers; the two sides, local and national, need to work together to make sure that goals can be achieved. Promoting collaboration is key; contributions from the local level should be acknowledged systematically with responses from government representatives.

An indicator of success for collaboration between affected parties and decision-makers in addressing malnutrition may be better-informed policies. Success should also take the form of an ability to more reliably recognizing poverty and the markers for poverty, and evidence that community members are able to access initiatives, services and support.

Proposal 2: Reduce the stigma associated with 'holiday hunger'

There is a degree of stigma attached to the issue of holiday hunger and other similar terms. Families affected suffer as a result of this stigma, and this in some cases acts as a block to addressing the issue head-on.

Dialogue participants indicated that they could support this initiative by:

- empowering people to campaign for what they want and what they need
- ensuring that, with regards to education and academic facilities, funding is directed to the right projects, in the right manner.

FSDs discussion topic: 'Farmers and food producers in Scotland are able to make a living from producing sustainable, nutritious and affordable food.'

Proposal 3: Agree on a systems-based definition of sustainably-produced food

It would be valuable for the Scottish government to agree on a definition of sustainably produced food. This definition should include all processes and sectors which are part of food systems, such as soil regeneration and other ecosystem services. It would provide a coherent guide for policy decisions in areas such as the allocation of subsidies and public procurement.

This definition would be usable by both producers and consumers. It would support farmers and manufacturers to be better informed as to what constitutes sustainably produced foods and it would assist consumers to be informed as they make retail purchases.

An indicator of success for this initiative may take the form of this definition being written into legislation. Further downstream, success would be measured by outcomes such as observing more young people in agriculture, and an improved ability to monitor and improve key metrics (because these metrics would be underpinned by a clear and consistent definition). Metrics would encompass areas such as soil quality, pollinators and health outcomes.

Proposal 4: Build on progress made with the Good Food Nation Bill

The Scottish government has the opportunity to build a more robust and systems-based approach to making food systems more sustainable and nutritious, following the launch of the Good Food Nation Bill, expected in 2020. The government should take an integrated approach to policy-making, to ensure that environmental policy, agricultural policy and health policy are linked. In the past, policy priorities and decision-making frameworks have presented challenges to civil servants in regards to pursuing an integrated agenda. Relatedly, there has been some reluctance within the Scottish government to recognize that farming should change. The Good Food Nation Bill presents an opportunity to overcome both of these issues.

Proposal 5: Transform practices in the livestock sector to improve environmental outcomes

Livestock plays a major role in transforming the sustainability and nutrition value of food systems. Integrated crop and livestock systems, when they are built to be circular, are high-impact in terms of reducing the use of pesticides and fertilizers, and increasing availability of nutritious foods.

FSDs discussion topic: 'Supermarkets play their part in tackling overconsumption, undernutrition and the incidence of NCDs such as obesity.'

Proposal 6: Remove mechanisms in supermarkets which promote over-consumption and unhealthy food

Incentives to buy unhealthy food, which are built into the supermarket shopping experience, should be removed. Price promotions, supermarket layout, product placements and advertising are examples of strategies which promote buying unhealthy food. The responsibility to force change in this area through regulation lies with the Scottish government; however, to some extent, supermarkets themselves also have a moral responsibility to protect public health and should enact voluntary measures.

Some progress in this area is already evident. Certain supermarkets, together with their suppliers, have recognized the business opportunity tied to being more oriented towards health, environment and social justice.

An indicator of success for this initiative may take the form of the establishment of strict dietary guidelines (through regulation) for the goods sold by food retailers. More long-term success may be measured by a decrease observed in instances of diabetes and cancer, as well as an improvement in metrics tied to the amount of fruit and vegetable sold in Scotland (although it should be noted that the sale of fruit and vegetables does not necessarily equate to consumption of these products).

Proposal 7: Improve the traceability of supply chains

It would be impactful to improve the traceability of supply chains for the products sold in supermarkets, as well as to establish a system of certification in relation to the use of ethical activities by supermarkets.

Proposal 8: Create a safe space for supermarkets to participate in change

Supermarkets face mounting public pressure to adapt their practices to promote nutritious and sustainable food systems. In this context, it would be useful to develop a safe space for dialogue and collaboration between supermarkets and advocates of improved food systems.

Specifically, to support the objective of making supply chain information visible and transparent, it is important to create a safe space for retailers to share data. Likewise, improved collaboration mechanisms would allow for best practice-sharing and the development of clear standards. At present, supermarkets can be somewhat fearful in regards to competition, legal concerns and publishing data. Supermarkets should be invited into discussion spaces and into projects and consortiums to show a safe or more collaborative space. Interactions should not be fuelled by blame, but rather by a desire to reach a shared understanding of what their role can be in transforming food systems.

Dialogue participants indicated that they could support this initiative by:

- universities supporting research that is broad-based and encompasses metrics which are important to commercial retailers, rather than focusing purely on nutrition metrics

FSDs discussion topic: 'Edinburgh reduces her carbon footprint from food consumption as a city.'

Proposal 9: Develop a city-level carbon footprinting and auditing tool

It is important to understand where Edinburgh's carbon footprint originates across the food supply chain. To this end, it would be valuable to invest in the development of a city-level carbon-footprinting tool.

Food businesses, as well as public sector institutions, councils, schools, hospitals, and other entities would be required to use this tool and to report their consumption. Reporting would allow to track where the major opportunities for reducing the city's carbon footprint are, and to be alerted to new patterns of increased consumption. It would also give businesses clear visibility on their consumption, pointing them towards areas of improvement, for example, in reducing the production of environmentally unfriendly meat products.

Reporting should be broken down so that it can be understood in a meaningful way.

Tax implications could be potentially attached to the carbon footprinting tool, to strengthen the disincentive to institutions of generating a high carbon footprint.

To avoid a disproportionate burden being borne by small businesses when participating in this audit and reporting process, small organizations could be partnered with larger businesses, or could be supported by cooperative fora which can assist to make the reporting process simpler and less costly. Business associations across Edinburgh could possibly perform this role.

An indicator of success for this initiative could take the form of an observed reduction in carbon footprint by organizations in Edinburgh, year on year. This level of monitoring would be possible given that the reporting tool would be based on collecting quantified data. Success could also be defined as observing strong engagement with the reporting tool by public and private organizations.

As a background to this initiative, at a national level, it would be useful for Scotland to develop a collective understanding of what success looks like in terms of the reduction of the country's carbon footprint. Scotland has made some progress with initiatives to reduce the carbon footprint of food systems, but higher-impact change requires clear targets.

Proposal 10: Create supporting structures to help actors change

Collaboration to work towards food systems transformation should be supported through formal roles and structures. One avenue for promoting collaboration could be to create food systems champions within organizations, representing different components of enabling healthy and nutritious food systems. These champions could form a core body to help their organizations develop positive practices.

In a similar way, to promote changes in behavior among everyday citizens, a citizen assembly could be created, to spread knowledge and promote tactics to engage with food systems sustainably.

Dialogue participants indicated that they could support this initiative by:

- contributing to planning and building the carbon audit tool

FSDs discussion topic: 'Food sector workers in Edinburgh, Scotland have decent work and can afford an adequate standard of living.'

Proposal 11: Establish a definition of 'decent standard of living' for food sector workers

In order to promote a decent standard of living for food sector workers, it is necessary to first define what is meant by a decent standard of living, to frame the target that society should work towards.

This definition may include outcomes related to feeling valued as a sector and as a workforce, enabling stability of contracts, the existence of structures guaranteeing representation in decision-making institutions, and connections with decision-makers. In addition, the notion of decent living standards could encompass the ability for individuals and businesses to plan for the long-term, and gain access to different forms of financing.

Proposal 12: Empower food sector workers through education and collective structures

Food sector workers should be empowered to make change within their organizations through receiving information and education. Education programs for food sector workers could potentially be delivered through workers' assemblies, or through cooperatives. A large part of the purpose of these education fora would be to give individuals a sense of value and ownership of their work.

This initiative adopts a bottom-up approach to fostering change. A bottom-up strategy may be effective where insofar as there is a degree of pessimism as to the ability for organizations in Scotland to change through top-down pressure.

Proposal 13: Conduct a landscape review and a survey of food sector workers

Given the great diversity of food sector workers in Scotland, it would be valuable to undertake a landscape review of all areas in which people are employed in relation to food across the country. Food sector workers encompass a very broad range of employees, from supermarket managers to abattoir workers.

The review would investigate information such as nature of work, salary levels, context of work, and work environment. Additionally, it could contain a component on work satisfaction, based on the roll-out of a survey or other data collection. Using the results of this review and survey data, it would be possible to establish a baseline for conditions in the food sector, which can then form the basis for developing targets and measuring progress.

Examples of surveys such as this exist, and could be taken as a starting point for a similar exercise in Scotland.

Proposal 14: Leverage procurement processes to support local businesses

Procurement processes could be leveraged to promote sustainable and nutritious food systems in Scotland. For example, the government could build structures and incentives which support procurement from small local businesses.

Concluding comments from the FSDs Curator, Dr. David Nabarro.

There is real interest amongst the range of actors at these FSDs to continue interdisciplinary dialogues to establish more effective ways to transform food systems so that they are good for people and the planet. They want to do this within a specific Scottish context and to explore each issue in a decentralised way.

Participants see a role for individual action in relation to changing their own diets and to influencing production practices

Participants recognize the need for structural changes as some of the existing patterns of production and consumption reflect pre-existing and long-standing power-structures in society.

The progress of any future FSDs in Scotland depends to an extent on the degree to which different actors within food systems can coalesce around and agree on definitions for sustainability, access and so on.

The follow up to the Edinburgh FSDs will involve the weaving together of multiple perspectives in a composite series of actions – and this has to be done in ways which are inclusive of actors from all relevant sectors in local and national Government (and that is most sectors...), from multiple disciplines within universities, as well as the full range of private actors (businesses, retailers, catering), as well as from farmers, fishers and other producers.

There are others who were not in Edinburgh and need to be engaged in due course (such as agricultural labourers and the retail sector): inclusiveness is key to the success of these kinds of dialogues.