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Scotland's Food and Drink Sector: Driving a Greener Future

The recently issued consultation draft of the Scottish Government's Environment Strategy (**Strategy**) sets out a framework which aims to address climate change, nature loss, and pollution, while supporting four central priorities: economic growth, social fairness, environmental protection, and high-quality public services. The Strategy sets a bold course for a net zero, nature-positive, and circular economy, and firmly recognises the key role that the Scottish food and drink sector has to play. The sector itself is presented in the Strategy as both a vital economic pillar, and a key area for environmental action.

Key Themes from the Strategy

Local food and circular supply chains

Nearly half of Scotland's ecological footprint comes from overseas sourcing, with food consumption being the largest contributor. The Strategy highlights the importance of enhancing local food production and circular supply chains to reduce Scotland's overseas food footprint, cut food miles, and enable more people to enjoy locally grown food. The complexity of localising food systems is, however, acknowledged as is the need to strengthen the evidence base for further action.

Sustainable food production and agriculture

The Strategy confirms ambitions for Scotland to become a global leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture^[1], and to transform support for farming and food production, ensuring that Scotland meets more of its own food needs sustainably. This includes:

- Supporting and working with farmers and crofters to adopt sustainable and regenerative agricultural practices, as set out in the Scottish Government's associated Code of Practice^[2]; and
- Doubling the amount of land used for organic farming by 2026, with a forthcoming organic action plan to encourage greater consumption and availability of organic produce.

Diet, health and food waste

The Strategy highlights the importance of shifting towards sustainable, healthy diets and cutting food waste as key opportunities for reducing emissions, alleviating pressure on nature, and helping households reduce expenses.

Key points include:

- Reiteration of the Climate Change Committee's recommendation to achieve a 20% shift away from all meat and dairy in Scotland by 2035;
- Recognition of the need to avoid offshoring emissions by importing less sustainable meat and dairy products; and
- Reducing food waste by delivering the actions set out in the Circular Economy and Waste Route Map^[3], including development of an intervention plan to guide long-term household behaviour change.

Strategic considerations for the Scottish food and drink sector

For food and drink businesses the Strategy presents both a challenge and an opportunity. Practical steps to align with its direction include:

- Mapping and monitoring environmental impacts, including emissions, nature loss, and waste, to support transparency and continuous improvement;
- Engaging with Scottish Government pilot schemes for funding and innovation support;

¹ Sustainable and regenerative farming - next steps: statement - gov.scot

² Sustainable and regenerative agriculture: code of practice - gov.scot

³ Scotland's circular economy and waste route map to 2030 - gov.scot

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- Positioning products to reflect health and sustainability priorities;
- Reducing packaging impacts and optimising supply chains;
- Collaborating across the sector on reusable packaging and surplus redistribution initiatives.

Conclusion

The Strategy confirms that the food and drink sector is expected to play a leading role in Scotland's transition to a sustainable future, with a focus on regenerative agriculture, local food systems, healthy diets, and food and packaging waste reduction. The Strategy highlights the need for a holistic approach that supports rural economies, protects natural resources, and ensures that the benefits of transformation are shared fairly across society.

The draft Environment Strategy consultation closed on 29 September 2025. As a draft, the Strategy remains subject to change following further consultation and policy development.

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