Mechanisms Supporting Policy Coherence In Uk Food Strategies

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The policy coherence diagnostic toolkit can be found at:
https://www.gainhealth.org/policy-coherence-toolkit

SUMMARY

Food policy has been an active area in the UK throughout 2025. Three of four UK nations having recently published food strategies and plans, with another in preparation, all within a changing geopolitical context. Against this backdrop, this working paper highlights key gaps and potential actions for fostering coherence within food strategies and governments in the UK based on an analysis of UK food strategies using a new tool, the Food Systems Policy Coherence (FSPC) Diagnostic tool. This tool, composed of two modules, aims to provide a simplified and standardised approach to measure policy coherence.

We applied Module 1 of the FSPC tool, which focuses on government structures and mechanisms to support coherence and covers five domains: Framework Documents; Political Commitment; Capacity and Implementation; Coordination Structures; Inclusivity, Stakeholder Engagement and Voice; and Monitoring and Accountability. For the UK strategies, Political Commitment was the best-performing domain, with all nations scoring highly, as a national food strategy or plan was in place, or in development, in each case. Capacity and Implementation, Coordinating Structures, and Monitoring and Accountability were the areas where most improvement is needed. Scores could be improved by including targets, key performance indicators, and detailed plans for monitoring progress and revising the food strategy.

We also analysed the main themes included in the visions of the food strategies and plans and highlighted how UK nations can learn from each other's approaches. As to be expected given the shocks food systems have recently experienced, resilience forms a key part of the visions of each food strategy, along with the need for more sustainably produced foods. Each UK nation could benefit from clearly outlining all objectives, targets and responsible departments for each action in their strategies. Linking targets with existing policies and frameworks also helps to highlight connections across the system, and areas to potentially improve coherence. However, some strategies included many targets that were already in place before the strategy was developed. Given the urgency of health and environmental challenges related to food, increasing the ambition of food strategies is key.

KEY MESSAGES

- There is considerable momentum in the development of food strategies and plans in the UK. Seizing this opportunity to enhance the mechanisms that can support coherent strategies and processes and to learn from the approaches of other nations could enhance their impact and success.
- Current UK food strategies/plans and government mechanisms were analysed using Module 1 of the Food Systems Policy Coherence (FSPC) Diagnostic tool.
- The highest scores were achieved for the Framework Documents and Political Commitment domains, while Capacity and Implementation, Coordinating Structures, and Monitoring and Accountability are the areas where most improvement is needed across all four UK nations.
- Governments should develop food systems training and impact assessment tools, establish ongoing cross-departmental platforms to collaborate on food systems transformation, and identify champions for food systems approaches in all departments.
- Priorities for future strategies and plans include developing actions for each objective across all food system sectors, and detailed indicators and monitoring plans.

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVE

UK food policy is experiencing a period of fast-paced change in the wake of leaving the European Union (EU), social and economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and recent changes in government. This presents an opportunity to create lasting change and develop more coherent, ambitious food strategies and joined-up approaches to food policymaking in the UK. At this important moment for shaping food policy in the UK, it is important to ensure that the processes in place are conducive to coordinated food systems approaches across sectors, stakeholders, and government departments, with strong accountability and monitoring mechanisms. All of these aspects can potentially help support policy coherence, 'The alignment of policies that affect the food system with the aim of achieving health, environmental, social and economic goals, to ensure that policies designed to improve one food system outcome do not undermine others' (1). Policy coherence can help increase the efficiency and effectiveness of food policy actions—which is particularly urgent given the multiple challenges food systems currently face across health, environmental, livelihoods, resilience, and other domains (2).

To better understand policy coherence in practice, GAIN, in collaboration with AKADEMIYA2063, have developed the Food Systems Policy Coherence (FSPC) Diagnostic Tool (3,4). This diagnostic tool aims to provide researchers, civil servants, policymakers, and others who support policy design and implementation with an easy-to-use and standardised framework with which to assess the level of coherence of food systems policies within a country, without the user having extensive training in policy coherence analysis. The tool contains two modules (3). Module 1 assesses the structures and mechanisms in place which may support better coherence between food systems policies, whereas Module 2 delves into actual coherence between existing policies across sectors and key food systems goals. Of note, this paper only examines the application of Module 1 of the tool. Module 2, which is longer and more detailed and focuses on actual policy content across sectors, may require more adaptation before being applicable in high-income countries. That is beyond the scope of the present paper.

Prior to conducting this analysis, the tool had only been applied in low- and middle-income countries, making its applicability to high-income countries unclear. Its application to the UK context therefore delivers on two objectives: (1) to assess the level of food systems policy coherence in government mechanisms and across the UK, and (2) to test the applicability of the tool to a high-income country. In this case, government mechanisms refer to activities such as the establishment of cross-sectoral food systems platforms for collaboration across government departments, processes for gathering feedback from a range of stakeholders, staff capacity building approaches and toolkits for integrating food systems approaches, including many others discussed more in the following sections.

This working paper reports on the results of that application.

BOX 1. THE FOOD SYSTEMS POLICY COHERENCE DIAGNOSTIC TOOL

The tool, composed of two modules, was developed based on prior research assessing policy coherence and the UN Food Systems Summit **(UNFSS)** process. The tool draws most heavily on the OECD Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD) Self-Assessment Tool and the UNEP-led SDG indicator for SDG 17.14.1 on policy coherence for sustainable development. The tool**kit** includes a user's manual with the background of the development of the tool, a **tool** containing all the questions, and a scoring guide (3–5).

Module 1 relates to the mechanisms in place that may facilitate between coherence. Questions in the module are divided into five domains**, as** summarised below. The full description of these domains, along with references linked with their development can be found in the FSPC Diagnostic Tool User**'s** Manual (4).

Framework Documents: looks at whether there is an overarching plan, strategy or framework in place which takes a food systems approach. The questions consider level of detail in the visions, objects**,** and targets of the document, as well as the intersections across different sectors and stakeholder groups.

Political Commitment: focuses more specifically on political commitment to a vision, rather than the articulation of a vision in the document.

Capacity and Implementation: looks at factors supporting the implementation of strategies, such as links with new and existing policies, training staff on integrated food systems approaches, and creating detailed budgets and investment plans of exactly how the total funds allocation to a scheme will be spent.

Coordination Structures: relates to the mechanisms that facilitate groups and individuals taking a food systems approach across different government departments, as well as different levels of government, from city to regional to national.

Inclusivity, Stakeholder Engagement, and Voice: identifies processes in place to gather feedback from non-governmental stakeholders, both technical stakeholders such as academics and non-technical such as general citizens, civil society organisations, and private industry. This domain also looks at whether the country hosted any national dialogues through the **UNFSS** in 2021.

Monitoring and Accountability: relates to the how progress will be monitored, by whom and how often. This also includes questions about clear and measurable key performance indicators, timelines for reviewing and revising the overall strategy.

Module 2 focuses on identifying specific instances of coherence or incoherence between a country's food systems policies or policy instruments and key goals of food systems transformation. While Module 2 is outside of the scope of this paper, the full details of Module 2 can be found starting on page 37 of the user's manual here.

DEVOLUTION OF POLICY ACROSS THE UK

Different areas of food-related policy are ***devolved*** in the UK, meaning that nations (i.e., England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland) can develop their own policies on these topics. In contrast, ***reserved*** policy areas are led by Westminster (the 'UK Government'), for the whole of the UK. A summary of policy areas in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland that are devolved or 'reserved', is shown in Table 1. Given that each nation developed their own food strategy, in order to assess the mechanisms supporting policy coherence in the UK as a whole, Module 1 of the tool was applied to the overarching food strategy documents for each individual nation.

Table 1. Devolved and reserved areas of UK policy

Policy Area	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
Health and social care	D	D	D
Education and training	D	D	D
Local Government	D	D	D
Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	D	D	D
Transport	D	D	D
Some taxation	D	D	D
Justice and Policing	D	R	D
Some social security elements	D	R	D
Sports and the arts	D	D	D
Defence	R		
Foreign Affairs			
Immigration			
Trade Policy			
Constitution			
Broadcasting			

METHODOLOGY

FOOD SYSTEMS DIAGNOSTIC TOOL

The FSPC Tool is summarised in Box 1. Module 1 of the FSPC tool relates to a country's overarching national food systems policy document (3). For many countries this takes the form of the National Pathway submitted as part of the UNFSS. Where available, the analysis uses another national, 'high-level document (in the form of a strategy, policy, or plan) that presents a vision and action priorities or plans for the food system as a whole, going beyond sectoral policies'. This is usually a national food strategy, or a plan for a national food strategy. The most important aspect is that the document takes a food systems approach rather than focusing on one sector, for example an Agriculture Strategic Plan.

The module questions focus on the content of the document as well as the processes within government that may help facilitate better coherence, such as food systems training for staff and the inclusion of inputs from a wide range of stakeholders and sectors. This analysis was carried out between April and June 2025. The tool was applied to the most recent and appropriate UK national food strategies or plans, as explained in the

following sections. National food strategies were identified through the relevant government websites. It is important to note this analysis was carried out during a relatively dynamic policy period in the UK when new food strategy documents were being produced.

ANALYSIS APPROACH

Document analysis was carried out on each of the food strategies to answer each of the questions from Module 1. If the documents alone were considered insufficient for answering any question, government websites were searched for additional relevant documents to provide the information. Answers were captured in an Excel spreadsheet, using a template developed by a team that applied the tool in Indonesia. Once questions were answered, standardised scoring (provided as part of the FSPC toolkit) was applied and total scores for each domain were obtained. Each score was then linked to a threshold: low, moderately low, moderate, or high. The scoring thresholds for each domain can be seen in Table A1 in Annex 1. The tool includes recommendations for each question where a full score is not achieved. These relevant recommendations were noted for each country and tailored to the context when necessary.

The overall outlooks and priority issues identified by each nation were analysed by exploring the themes in the visions, aims, and objectives of the framework documents. Themes were identified by exploring the recurring topics that were included in the visions, aims, and objectives. Furthermore, as each nation took slightly different approaches to developing their strategies and plans, the mechanisms they have in place and some best practises and 'lessons learned' were identified from each nation and are highlighted in the paper's discussion.

FRAMEWORK DOCUMENTS IN THE DEVOLVED NATIONS

The main framework document used to complete this tool is considered to be a high-level, national document which can be a strategy, policy, or plan that takes a food systems approach to achieve a specified vision and goals, including a National Pathway document submitted as part of the UNFSS. The documents used for each nation are discussed below.

In England, the Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (Defra) published a food strategy in 2022 (7). This strategy was developed as a response to an independent review of England's Food Strategy, led by Henry Dimbleby (8). In Spring 2025, a Food Strategy Advisory Board was announced to develop a new food strategy, chaired by Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs Daniel Zeichner MP (9). In July 2025, the new food strategy for England was released, including a new vision and 10 priority actions (10). However, the implementation plan for this strategy and associated metrics and indicators are still in development (10). As these aspects form an important part of Module 1 in the FSPC Diagnostic Tool, the present analysis focuses on the 2022 food strategy.

In 2022 the Scottish government passed the Good Food Nation Bill, and it became an Act. This Act required the Scottish government to produce a national food plan. To fulfil this requirement, the government developed the first draft of The Proposed Good Food Nation Plan, published in 2024 (11). This draft underwent a public consultation in 2024, and a new Proposed Plan was published in June 2025 based on the feedback (12). This analysis refers to that revised Proposed Plan.

The Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework was published in November 2024, providing an overview of the vision and outcomes expected. The Action Plan for the Northern Ireland Food Strategy was published on May 14, 2025, and both documents were considered for this analysis (13).

When this analysis was first carried out, the Wales Community Food Strategy had not yet been published; therefore, the UK UNFSS national pathway was used for Wales. After the Community Food Strategy was published in late April (14), the analysis was repeated for Wales with the new strategy, the results of which are presented in this report. A summary of the framework documents used for this analysis and their current status can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of the Framework Documents

Nation	Document	Summary	Status
England	Government food strategy (2022)	Developed after an independent review on the National Food Strategy, commissioned by Defra. The government then published this food strategy, which includes an overarching vision, objectives, and six actions to achieve the objectives.	This strategy was signed off by the government in 2022 but has since been replaced with a new 2025 food strategy that was published after this analysis was completed.
Northern Ireland (NI)	NI Food Strategy Framework	Sets out the vision, strategies, guiding decision principles, and implementation approach of the strategy. The first phase is from 2025-27.	The framework and action plan were agreed upon by the Northern Ireland Executive.
	NI Food Strategy Action Plan	The Action Plan lays out 39 short- and medium-term actions to achieve each of the missions. The document also indicates which government departments are responsible for leading each initiative.	
Scotland	Proposed Good Food Nation Plan (June 2025)	Developed as a requirement of the Good Food Nation Act, which specified the details that were required to be included in the Plan. This Proposed Plan incorporates the feedback received from a public consultation on the Draft Plan. It sets out the vision, objects, approaches to implementation, and plans to monitor progress.	This plan was laid before the Scottish Parliament in June 2025. In September 2025, the Plan is undergoing scrutiny in the Scottish Parliament, and the final plan is due to be published in December 2025.

Wales	Community Food Strategy	The Welsh government's Programme for Government for 2021-26 included a commitment to develop a community food strategy. This strategy focuses on strengthening the resilience of communities, local food systems and food production within Wales.	This strategy was led and agreed upon by the Welsh Government.

FINDINGS

Table 3 summarises the results of applying the tool across the four nations, and the average for the UK, with the cells colour-coded to indicate the scoring for that domain in that nation. Overall, Scotland scored relatively strongly, with all domains being rated 'high' or 'moderate' in terms of their supportiveness of policy coherence. England was similar but with one domain scoring 'moderately low' instead of 'moderate.' Wales and Northern Ireland each had two areas scored as 'moderately low', in addition to two each scored as 'moderate' and 'high'. None of the countries scored 'low' in any domain. Capacity and Implementation and Monitoring and Accountability had the lowest scores, with all countries scoring either moderate or moderately low.

Framework Documents

All four nations had a national-level policy document or a plan that took a food systems approach, linking multiple sectors of the food system. All these documents included a vision, however not all strategies or plans included a target date, or key milestones for achieving the vision. The level of specificity for the key priorities for change within the food system, and the actions that would be taken also varied across the strategies. All strategies were developed with the involvement of multiple types of stakeholders through both public consultations and, in some cases, workshops.

Political Commitment

The only domain that consistently scored high across all nations was Political Commitment.

The level of political commitment was measured in two ways. First, we considered whether there has been a high-level commitment to a food strategy with a systems approach; since all food strategies were led and launched by government officials, this was considered to be a high-level commitment. Second, we asked whether there are any mechanisms for sustained commitment to food systems beyond electoral cycles. The establishment of review periods for strategies that extend beyond electoral cycles, having civil servants who are not political appointees working on food systems approaches, and the inclusion of commitments to developing food strategies and food systems approaches in party manifestos were considered as affirmative responses to this question, with a score of either two or three out of three, depending on the exact mechanism for ongoing commitment.

Table 3. Scores for each domain across the UK

Domain	UK average	England	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales
Framework Documents	Moderate	Moderate	High	Moderate	Moderate
Political Commitment	High	High	High	High	High
Capacity and Implementation	Moderate	Moderate	Moderately Low	Moderate	Moderately Low
Coordination Structures	Moderately Low	Moderately Low	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Inclusivity, Stakeholder Engagement and Voice	Moderate	High	Moderate	High	High
Monitoring and Accountability	Moderate	Moderate	Moderately Low	Moderate	Moderately Low

Capacity and Implementation

This domain looks at whether the pathway has been formally adopted, an action plan developed and linked with new or existing policies. In this analysis all nations linked the strategy documents with existing policies. The domain also questions whether there was a costed investment plan or budget available for the plans or schemes mentioned in the strategies. Most of the nations did mention funding allocated to some of the schemes highlighted in the strategies and plans. However, detailed breakdowns of how these budgets will be spent could not be found. It may be the case that these detailed budgets are created, but not made public.

Coordinating Structures

This domain related more to the mechanisms that are set up to facilitate a food systems approach across different government departments and different levels of government. As much of this information is not always included within food strategies, this involved searching government websites for the relevant information.

One of the main reasons scores were all moderate or moderately low for this domain was that there does not seem to be an individual designated to lead on food systems approaches in each department. While some government departments in some nations

have 'systems teams' that would cover food systems approaches, these are not present in all departments. Another aspect that was examined was the presence of ongoing national-level platforms both broadly encompassing food systems and about specific food systems topics. Temporary platforms that were set up, for example to create a food strategy, or groups that must disband at the end of each government cycle, were not considered ongoing. The mechanisms in place to engage different levels of government, such as local council, city, and subnational regions, also varied. As part of the Good Food Nation Plan, local councils will be required to develop their own Good Food Plans relevant to their local areas.

Inclusivity, Stakeholder Engagement and Voice

All countries except Northern Ireland also scored high in Inclusivity, Stakeholder Engagement and Voice. All countries had a mechanism in place to gather feedback on policy from a range of stakeholders. This usually took the form of public consultations that were open to all types of stakeholders; however, governments did not seem to actively ensure that all types of stakeholders, such as the general public or consumer groups, were adequately represented. Furthermore, it was not clear to what extent, or how, governments would ensure that the views of the public were given sufficient weight in the decision-making process.

Monitoring and Accountability

The moderately low scores in Monitoring and Accountability are mostly linked to a lack of mandatory food systems-linked impact assessments on policies, a lack of key performance indicators (KPIs) in the strategies, and lack of transparency around monitoring the progress of and revising the strategy. The periods for monitoring progress of the strategies ranged from every 2/3 years (Scotland/England) or in five years' time (Northern Ireland).

The domain scores for each nation are shown in Tables 4-7, along with the relevant recommendations.

Table 4. England – Scores and recommendations across each domain.

Domain	Score	Recommendations
Framework Documents	12.5	The English government developed a national food strategy in 2022 which includes an overarching vision and three objectives, along with six broad actions that cut across health, environment, agriculture, trade and livelihoods. This strategy could be strengthened by **making the vision more detailed and adding specific achievement dates and targets for the objectives** outlined at the beginning of the strategy. There is no indication of whether the issues highlighted for changed are prioritised in any particular order, or whether they are considered equally important or interlinked. Consider **greater prioritisation of the issues to address within the food system** (or state whether all issues are being considered as equally important).
Political Commitment	5	There is considered to be a high-level commitment to the food strategy and a food systems approach, as the government led the development of this strategy, and has since announced the development of a new strategy. The government also organised national dialogues as part of the UNFSS in 2021.
Capacity and Implementation	11	The government have developed toolkits and training for general systems thinking (15,16), however it would be beneficial to include training and support capacity building efforts **specific to food systems approaches** for all staff across departments. This strategy document does include the budget allocated to some actions and schemes. However, detailed breakdowns of how these budgets will be spent could not be found. **Continue pursuing the process for developing detailed investment plan for ring-fenced budgets for these schemes.**
Coordination Structures	5	The Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs is chairing the development of a national food strategy. Consider whether a role leading food systems transformation could be under the direct oversight of the prime minister, where it may have **more cross-sectoral visibility and/or authority than within a sectoral department.** Despite there being all-party parliamentary groups focusing on specific food systems issues, these groups close when there is an election and must then be reestablished afterwards. The government should **create an ongoing national-level platform or forums** (e.g., interdepartmental taskforces, committees) to promote cross-sectoral government coordination on food systems topics, **broadly encompassing food systems and forums for specific food systems topics or goals.** Some departments, such as Defra, also have designated systems teams. It would be beneficial to create similar teams across all departments (17). Each department should also **Identify and empower individuals to champion and advocate for food systems approaches in all government departments**.

Inclusivity, Stakeholder Engagement and Voice	8	The government has a process of holding public consultations to gather feedback on proposed policies. These consultations are open to everyone, however there is no specific mechanism to ensure representation across all sectors of stakeholders and the general public. When opening consultations for new policies, **add an explicit cross-sectoral aspect to existing technical consultation process**.
Monitoring and Accountability	19	The government committed to publishing a Food Security report every three years to monitor the progress of achieving the goals of the strategy. While there are capacity building approaches and tools to measure impacts of policies (i.e., their synergies and trade-offs), it would be helpful to also include assessments that **are specific to food systems impacts.** Linked with this, governments should make the use of methods or tools to assess the potential impacts of policy, laws, or regulations **on different parts of the food system** (i.e., their synergies and trade-offs) **mandatory**, at least in certain cases.

Table 5. Northern Ireland – Scores and recommendations across each domain.

Domain	Score	Recommendations:
Framework Documents	17	The Northern Irish government developed a Food Strategy Framework, outlining the vision and four priorities, described as interlinked. The framework summarises the focus and "what success looks like" for each priority. The Action Plan sets out 39 actions for the first phase of the strategy (2025-27). Including a wider range of stakeholders and sectors in the development of future food strategies and action plans, would help to ensure these documents cover all aspects of the food system.
Political Commitment	5	There is considered to be a high-level of commitment to the food strategy and a food systems approach, as the government led the development of this strategy framework and action plan.
Capacity and Implementation	9	The Action Plan states that actions will be low/no cost. For the actions that are planned to be low cost, it would be helpful to develop a **detailed investment plan or budget, or indicate which actions will be at no additional cost and how this will be done.** There was no information found on the Northern Ireland Executive websites about food systems training for civil servants. The Executive should develop training and support capacity-building efforts specific to food systems approaches for all staff across departments.

Coordination Structures	8.5	According to the Framework and Action Plan, a Food Programmed Board will be established to work across departments and engage a range of stakeholders on food systems, as well as overseeing the implementation of the Framework and Action Plan. It will be important to **ensure Food Programme Board continues functioning as a long-term coordination platform,** to ensure there are ongoing forums for food systems collaboration across government. Strengthening the mechanisms to engage different levels of government across city and regional levels, will also help to coordinate the implantation of this strategy. While there will be a Food Programme Board in place, the government should consider identifying and empowering individuals to champion and advocate for food systems approaches in each government department.
Inclusivity, Stakeholder Engagement and Voice	7.5	While the government carried out public consultations for the food strategy in Autumn 2021, according to the consultation reports only 2 private individuals (general citizens responded. Future consultations may require **more targets efforts to engage more general citizens** in the development of strategies, action plans, and consultations on food policies.
Monitoring and Accountability	10	The Action Plan lays out the key actions, delivery timeframe and responsible lead departments for the strategy, which is helpful for enhancing accountability towards each action. This would be strengthened **by including measurable targets and key performance indicators for each of the actions** (which is highlighted as an area of future work in the Strategy Framework. The first review of the strategy framework is scheduled for 2030, however it is not entirely clear who will lead this review. Consider **elaborating on the responsibilities for monitoring and reporting on progress** of the implementation of the strategy, and **ensure there are** mechanisms for making the monitoring/reporting participatory among non-governmental organisations. The Northern Ireland Executive promotes guidance on conducting health assessments developed by the Institute of Public Health in the Republic of Ireland (18). Conducting health impact assessments is an advisory but optional component of the policy making process in Northern Ireland (19). Making assessments of a policy, law or regulation's impacts on health and **on different parts of the food system mandatory**, at least in certain cases would help to identify the food systems trade-offs and synergies that could be brought about by new policies, laws and regulations.

Note: Green shading indicates domains where systems are highly supportive of coherence; yellow where they are moderately supportive; and orange where they are only somewhat supportive. Scoring thresholds for each domain can be found in Annex 1.

Table 6. Scotland - Scores and recommendations across each domain.

Domain	Score	Recommendations
Framework Documents	14	The Scottish government laid a Proposed Good Food Nation Plan (the Plan) before parliament in June 2025. This was an update from the 2024 Draft Plan which had gone through public consultation. The Proposed Plan lays out the vision and six objectives for a Good Food Nation, with a vision for what success in each objective would include. Each objective is also linked with existing policies, aspects of right to food legislation, and the relevant sustainable development goals. Adding **more specific measures or interventions** for those issues that lack detail would help strengthen the objectives (for example, p. 29 'we are taking steps to ensure that learning about food forms part of a broad general education available to children and young people in Scotland through our Curriculum for Excellence'). Furthermore, the Proposed Plan does not indicate whether there is any prioritisation of the issues to address within the food system (or state whether all issues are being considered as equally important). **Adding discussion of how the objectives are being prioritised, or whether they are being considered equally important and urgent**, would help to clarify the government's outlook on the most pressing issues.
Political Commitment	5	While the Proposed Plan is still undergoing scrutiny in the Scottish Parliament, the Good Food Nation Bill was passed in 2020, which was then made an Act. The Act required the government to develop the Good Food Nation Plan and set out the requirements of what should be included in the Plan. Although the final plan is still to be agreed upon, the passing of the Good Food Nation Bill indicates a high-level of commitment to developing the plan, while the details are still being refined. However, the Plan should be finalised and agreed upon as soon as possible to begin implementation.
Capacity and Implementation	11	No information could be found on the government website about civil service training specific to food systems. To further the integration of systems approaches into food policymaking in Scotland, it would be important **to develop training and support capacity building efforts specific to food systems approaches for staff across all departments.** Most actions did not have a budget mentioned within the Proposed Plan. The government should continue developing an investment plan or budget for each initiative mentioned within the Plan.
Coordination Structures	10	To integrate a food systems approach across government, it would be useful to identify and empower individuals to champion and advocate for food systems approaches in all government departments.

		Currently, there are established mechanisms in Scotland to involved different levels of government within the process, and once the Plan has been finalised and agreed upon, local councils will be required to develop their own plans relevant to their local context.
Inclusivity, Stakeholder Engagement and Voice	9	The Scottish government has a process in place for holding public consultations on new policies (20), and a public consultation was held to gather feedback on the Draft Good Food Nation Plan which fed into the Proposed Plan (21).
Monitoring and Accountability	19	Regulatory and Business Impact Assessments are expected to be completed for all new policies (22). These impact assessments do include sections for climate change/circular economy and consumers, but there is not a specific food systems lens within this. The Scottish government should consider **making capacity-building approaches and tools to collect and analyse evidence about the impacts of different policies (i.e., their synergies and trade-offs) specific to food systems.** Methods or tools to assess the potential impacts of policy, laws or regulations on different parts of the food system (i.e., their synergies and trade-offs) **should be mandatory, at least in certain cases.**

Note: Green shading indicates domains where systems are highly supportive of coherence; yellow where they are moderately supportive; and orange where they are only somewhat supportive. Scoring thresholds for each domain can be found in Annex 1.

Table 7. Wales - Scores and recommendations across each domain.

Domain	Score	Recommendations
Framework Documents	12.5	The Welsh Community Food Strategy sets out a strategic vision and ambition, as well as six objections for the strategy. The Strategy specifies that a food systems approach is being taken, and also highlights the operating principles guiding the work. The vision could be made more detailed and actionable by **adding specific achievement dates** for the objectives outlined at the beginning of the strategy. Adding **more specific detail about the measures or interventions each objective** would help strengthen this

		strategy (for example, “We will continue to work closely with the Commissioner to ensure more consistent integration of food across public body well-being plans.” and “We will raise the appeal of locally produced food by supporting interventions around education, training, information exchange and through marketing and promoting local and seasonal produce.”) It would also be helpful to indicate whether there is any **prioritisation of the issues** to address within the food system (or state whether all issues are being considered as equally important) and include more specific targets for achieving each of the objectives outlined.
Political Commitment	6	The Welsh government’s Programme for Government for 2021-26 included a commitment to develop this community food strategy.
Capacity and Implementation	8	There was not much discussion of the budgets associated with the actions being taken to achieve the objectives. The government should create or continue developing an investment plan or budget to implement each of the actions highlighted in the strategy. No information could be found regarding food systems training for civil servants in Wales. To further the integration of systems approaches into food policymaking in Wales, it would be important **to develop training and support capacity building efforts specific to food systems approaches for staff across all departments.**
Coordination Structures	10	In the "Cymru Can" 2023-2030 Action Plan for the Well-being of Future Generations Act, the Future Generations Commissioner focused on the contribution of food systems to achieving the wellbeing goals. The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs has committed to continue working with the Future Generations Commissioner to embed food as a priority within local planning and services. To integrate a food systems approach across government, it would be useful to identify and empower individuals to champion and advocate for food systems approaches in all government departments.
Inclusivity, Stakeholder Engagement and Voice	9	During the development of the strategy, the Welsh government commissioned a mapping of the community food landscape in Wales, which involved over 80 stakeholders across sectors including health, environment, agriculture, and business. Two surveys were also commissioned, one for consumers and one for stakeholders involved in community food initiatives. A public consultation process is also in place for future policies, and the Wellbeing of the Future Generations law states that the government must include a diversity of people in their decision-making (23,24).

Monitoring and Accountability	9	Along with adding more detailed actions for each objective, adding measurable targets, key performance indicators and reporting milestones would better support monitoring and evaluation of the Community Food Strategy. It would also be important to put in place **mechanisms to make the monitoring and reporting participatory among non-governmental organisations.** The government should also consider setting out a plan for the food strategy to undergo regular review and revision, with a clear review period specified, and identifying who will lead this process. Guidance is available for conducting non-statutory health impact assessments for policies in Wales (25), however this guidance would benefit from incorporating considerations specific to food systems and their potential synergies and trade-offs. Integrated Impact Assessments allow for assessments across multiple sectors to be brought together including health, environment, justice, equality, climate change, rural-proofing and many others. However, not all aspects are required to be covered in an integrated assessment (26–28). The Welsh government should seek to **include an overall food systems lens within guidance for integrated impact assessments** and ensure a food systems impact assessment is mandatory, at least in certain cases.

Note: Green shading indicates domains where systems are highly supportive of coherence; yellow where they are moderately supportive; and orange where they are only somewhat supportive. Scoring thresholds for each domain can be found in Annex 1.

VISIONS ACROSS THE UK FOOD STRATEGIES AND PLANS

When looking specifically at scope of the visions, aims, and objectives of the four national food strategies, there is a strong emphasis on improving the environmental sustainability of food systems as well as the quality of diets and human health. To varying degrees, each country also focused on the economic aspects of the food system, particularly regarding strengthening national food and drink industries, providing jobs, and enhancing skills development. Resilience is included in the visions of all four strategies, either explicitly or implicitly, as is the case in England's 2022 strategy, which 'ensures a secure food supply in an unpredictable world'. As the term resilience, like sustainability, is increasingly used across sectors in the food system in sometimes ambiguous ways, it would be helpful for governments to be specific in their food strategies about what resilience looks like and what food systems actors should be aiming for.

The Welsh strategy is more locally focused than other nations, with the recognition that addressing the food systems issues experienced on a local scale will complement the global food system. On the other hand, both Scotland and Northern Ireland are aiming to have global reputations for high-quality foods. The food strategy for England focuses more on increasing exports, including a target of reaching £1 trillion in annual exports, and 'broadly maintaining' levels of domestic production, including sustainable increasing production. In terms of policy coherence, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland have more explicit ambitions around holistic and joined-up approaches.

DISCUSSION

Overall, the UK has a solid foundation upon which to improve the food systems approaches and mechanisms to support the implementation of food strategies and plans across the countries. The strengths lie in the political commitment to having food strategies and plans in place, particularly strategies which span across multiple sectors of the food systems and include input from a range of non-governmental stakeholders. However, accountability mechanisms such as including key performance indicators for each action, and plans for monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of these strategies and plans were lacking. These areas will require more attention in development of future strategies and implementation plans.

THE DYNAMIC POLICY LANDSCAPE IN THE UK IN 2025

Since 2020, the UK has been experiencing a period of many policy changes and updates. After leaving the EU, many EU policies have gradually been updated with UK policies. As the EU was also one of its main trade partners, the UK has been developing trade agreements with countries further afield. There have also been changes in government, with a new government being elected in England in summer 2024. This presents an opportunity to introduce more coherent polices and foster practices that enable better policy coherence. However, it also means that during this dynamic period, it is difficult to establish definitive answers on the content of policies that are in development or could potentially be replaced within the coming years. For example, within two weeks of completing the initial analysis for this paper in April 2025, both the Welsh Community Food Strategy and the Action Plan for Northern Ireland's food strategy were published, and the analysis was in turn updated with the latest documents. Similarly, a new proposed Good Food National Plan for Scotland was published in June 2025, and again the analysis was updated. At the time of publication, the Proposed Good Food Nation Plan

is undergoing parliamentary scrutiny, and the final agreed plan is due to be published in December 2025 (29). The newest food strategy for England was published in July 2025, and we are currently awaiting the completion of the implementation plan for the outcomes, which will detail the key metrics and indicators (10).

The level of change during the period of analysis is a limitation of this work, and results may be slightly different if this tool were applied to strategies in, for example, one year's time. At this point, it is not possible to estimate how scores might change with the finalisation of new strategies, or whether they would change at all. Despite this period of flux, the results from this analysis may be helpful in the further development and revision of existing food strategies and implementation plans across the UK. Many of the questions in the Capacity and Implementation, Coordination Structures, and the Inclusivity, Stakeholder Engagement and Voice domains link with the structures and processes currently in place in the governments, rather than the content of the framework documents. These areas are less likely to change with new strategies, unless governments intentionally include measures within new strategies to integrate more food systems approaches into capacity building, ways of working, and mechanisms for including different stakeholders in the process of policymaking.

WHAT CAN THE DIFFERENT UK NATIONS LEARN FROM EACH OTHER?

Each nation has strengths in their approach in different domains, and best practices were identified to help those who scored lower. Best practices were identified by exploring the approaches taken by nations that scored high in aspects others scored low in, as well as observations made while analysing the documents.

Looking beyond the specific scoring of the diagnostic tool, Scotland's food strategy plan is very clearly laid out, providing a comprehensive overview, including a table of how each outcome links with current policies, the Sustainable Development Goals, and different aspects of Right to Food legislation. Other UK countries should look to Scotland's strategy as a useful template for laying out their objectives, being explicit about the targets for each objective to enable better accountability, and linking all actions with existing policies. Examples are included in Annex 2.

In addition to their Strategy Framework, Northern Ireland published an Action Plan, which provides a detailed breakdown of the actions to be taken in the first phase of their strategy to achieve each goal, the expected delivery timescale broken into short (<12 months) and medium term (1-24 months), and which departments are responsible for each action. This would have been improved if specific targets and KPIs were included for each of the actions. The level of detail was similar to the breakdown provided in Scotland's food strategy, and the strategies for both England and Wales could benefit from creating a clear table for each objective of the strategy, the relevant linked policies, action to be taken, targets and indicators, expected timeline, and department responsible for each action.

All UK nations are legally bound to ensuring the Right to Food for their population (30,31), however as the right to food has not been enshrined in domestic law, this obligation is not enforceable at a domestic level (32–34). Concerns have been raised about the extent to which the UK is meeting the obligation (34). Only Scotland and Northern Ireland included the Right to Food in their strategy. The Northern Ireland Action Plan included an action to

'Develop a cross departmental approach to applying the "Right to Food" guiding principle as set out in the NI Food Strategy Framework'. Achieving the Right to Food should be a central component of all food strategies across the UK, to ensure governments are recognising their responsibility to ensure adequate food for their populations. Integrating the Right to Food is also a useful way to link up various goals, such as access to and affordability of healthy diets for all. Many groups are campaigning for the right to food to be enshrined in law across the UK (31,35,36).

As part of the 2022 England Food Strategy, the government is required to produce a Food Security Report every three years. These Food Security Reports help with monitoring progress towards each of the targets in England's strategy, and the strategy includes a defined timeline for how often they will be published (7). While the scope of these Food Security Reports often covers the UK more broadly, other UK nations could adopt a similar approach of having regular set intervals at which they must publicly report on the state of the nation's food system and their progress towards key goals of their strategies.

The Welsh Future Generations Act, which focuses on ensuring the wellbeing of future generations across seven key goals, revolves around a vision of Wales as being prosperous, resilient, more equal, healthier, with cohesive communities, a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language, and globally responsible. The Cymru Can strategy for 2023-2030, published by the Office of Future Generations Commissioner, focuses on improving the food system as a link to all seven forms of wellbeing included in the Future Generations Act 2015 (23,37). This Act was the first of its kind globally, and since 2015 when it was passed, many other countries have followed Wales' lead and have begun working on their own Future Generations Acts. The Welsh Government have developed a toolkit to help governments develop this type of legislation (38). It would be beneficial for the other UK governments to also incorporate this type of thinking and policy approach into their work, to ensure they are integrating long-term thinking, and the wellbeing of youth and future generations, into their strategies.

When this analysis was initiated, there was no published food strategy for Wales. There were efforts to pass the Food (Wales) Bill in 2023, however these were unsuccessful. Despite this, further action on developing a food strategy for Wales was taken, and the Welsh Government published the Food Matters report in 2024. The Food Matters report brought together all current food policies across the nation, highlighting their potential contributions to achieving the Future Generation Wellbeing Goals (see an excerpt of this table in Annex Figure 1) (39). A similar audit of a nation's current food policy landscape could provide a useful starting point to highlight policy gaps and how current policies could be better aligned, as part of developing a national food strategy. While England and Scotland have also included lists of existing policies linked with each outcome of their strategy or plan, the Welsh Food Matters Report goes a step further, indicating which wellbeing goals each policy directly contributes to, or whether there is an opportunity for broader contribution. Summarising the links between all relevant policies and all wellbeing goals and areas where there is opportunity for further alignment together provides a more comprehensive overview of the links across goals and the potential gaps.

Training specifically linked with food systems was found to be lacking across all nations. While there seems to be limited training specific to food systems, there were still instances of training and capacity building tools linked with overall systems thinking. For example in England, the Government Office for Science published an introductory

systems thinking toolkit for civil servants (15,16). Toolkits are also available for a range of 'futures' thinking approaches (40). For example, the Welsh Government has trained staff in the 'Three Horizons' approach and developed a toolkit to help staff think about the long-term impacts of policy decisions and how trends may change over time (41). As part of this Futures approach, the Office of the Commissioner for Future Generations publishes Future Trends and Future Generations reports at regular intervals. Governments should build on the existing training provided to civil servants, and include modules specific to food systems thinking and approaches to understand long-term impacts of policies on the food system.

REFLECTING ON THE APPLICATION OF THE TOOL IN A HIGH-INCOME COUNTRY

As noted above, in addition to understanding the extent to which UK governance structures and mechanisms are supportive of policy coherence for food systems, this application also sought to test whether the FSPC diagnostic tool, which was initially tested in low- and middle-income countries, was also applicable to high-income country contexts. Overall, the application confirmed that it was: nearly all questions in Module 1 were found to be applicable to the UK context, and overall the tool was practical to apply based on review of documents publicly available in the UK. Some small adjustments were recommended to the tool during the application, which have since been incorporated into the final published version of the tool, but these were largely for clarity and applicable across all contexts, not specific to high-income countries. For example, food policy experts who reviewed the results as part of the Advisory Group for the development of the FSPC tool did note that the tool overall provided a more optimistic view of policy coherence and the quality of food policies than they, as experts, would have expected. As a result, the scoring was revisited to be more critical and the questions were revisited to include more challenging options, such as higher requirements for the number of food systems sectors included in the framework documents or the range of stakeholders involved in consultations to obtain the highest score. These changes are reflected in the results presented in this paper.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the development of national food strategies and plans in the UK through the lens of policy coherence by applying the newly developed Food Systems Policy Coherence Diagnostic Tool, representing the first application of this tool in a high-income country context. The results show that efforts to develop national food strategies in the UK are promising, however, certain aspects of the systems and processes currently in place could be strengthened to support the success of these strategies. The main areas for improvement needed are related to Capacity and Implementation, Coordinating Structures, and Monitoring and Accountability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The specific recommendations for each nation are listed in Tables 4-7. Broadly, the recommendations relate to:

- Adding more specificity to the visions (including key milestones for when the vision should be achieved), targets, and KPIs so progress towards achieving targets can be measured—and governments can be held accountable if results are not achieved.

- Continuing to develop a more detailed budget for each of the initiatives discussed in the strategy, or making budgets publicly available where they exist to improve transparency and further support accountability.)
- Ensuring methods used to assess potential impacts of policies and strategies include analysis of the potential food systems impacts.
- Integrating food systems approaches and knowledge into capacity-building programmes for all government staff.
- Adding new targets so the strategy/plan is not only relying on existing targets and programmes.
- Indicating which departments are responsible for leading on the delivery of each objective.

The UK's nations have all made positive starts towards improved food systems policymaking; by taking some or all of these recommendations on board, they will be in an even stronger place. However, this analysis has only considered the governance systems and structures as designed and in plans/strategies – implementation of these approaches to actually affect the lived experience of UK citizens will be critical for addressing the interlinked food systems challenges the UK faces.

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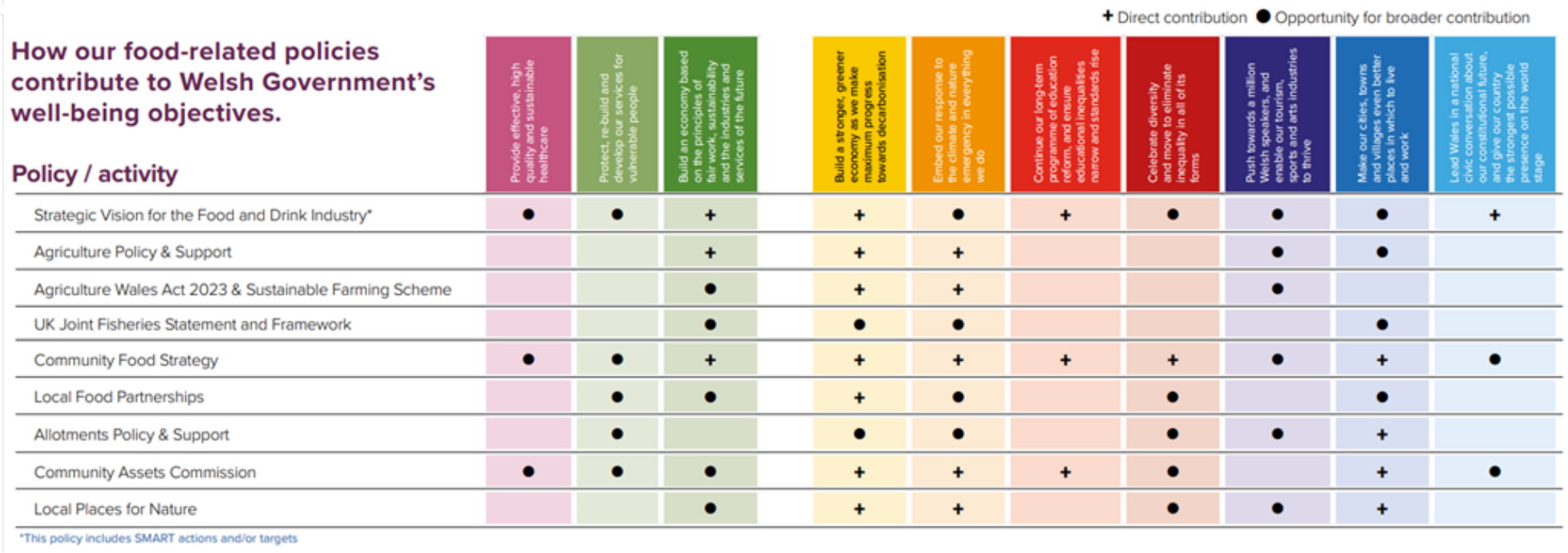
ANNEX

Annex Figure 1. How Welsh food-related policies contribute to the Governments well-being objectives.



+ Direct contribution ● Opportunity for broader contribution

How our food-related policies contribute to Welsh Government's well-being objectives. Policy / activity	Provide effective, high quality and sustainable healthcare	Protect, re-build and develop our services for vulnerable people	Build an economy based on the principles of fair work, sustainability and the industries and services of the future	Build a stronger, greener economy as we make maximum progress towards decarbonisation	Embed our response to the climate and nature emergency in everything we do	Continue our long-term programme of education reform, and ensure educational inequalities narrow and standards rise	Celebrate diversity and move to eliminate inequality in all of its forms	Push towards a million Welsh speakers, and enable our tourism, sports and arts industries to thrive	Make our cities, towns and villages even better places in which to live and work	Lead Wales in a national civic conversation about our constitutional future, and give our country the strongest possible presence on the world stage
Strategic Vision for the Food and Drink Industry*	●	●	+	+	●	+	●	●	●	+
Agriculture Policy & Support			+	+	+			●	●	
Agriculture Wales Act 2023 & Sustainable Farming Scheme			●	+	+			●		
UK Joint Fisheries Statement and Framework			●	●	●				●	
Community Food Strategy	●	●	+	+	+	+	+	●	+	●
Local Food Partnerships		●	●	+	●		●		●	
Allotments Policy & Support		●		●	●		●	●	+	
Community Assets Commission	●	●	●	+	+	+	●		+	●
Local Places for Nature			●	+	+		●	●	+	

*This policy includes SMART actions and/or targets

Reproduced from Food Matters Wales Report (39)

ANNEX 1. SCORING THRESHOLDS

Table A1. Scoring thresholds for each domain

Domain	Low	Moderately Low	Moderate	High
Framework Documents	0 - 5.5	5.5 - 11	11 - 16.5	17 - 18
Political Commitment	0 - 1.65	1.65 - 3.3	3.3 - 5	5 - 6
Capacity and Implementation	0 - 5	5 – 9.5	9.5 - 14	14 - 15
Coordination Structures	0- 4	4 - 8	8 - 12	12 - 13
Inclusivity, Stakeholder Engagement and Voice	0 - 2.5	2.5 - 5	5 - 7.5	8 - 9
Monitoring and Accountability	0 - 7	7 - 14	14 - 20	20 - 21

ANNEX 2. EXTRACTS FROM SCOTLAND'S GOOD FOOD NATION PLAN (BOTH 2024 AND 2025 EXAMPLES)

The table below is from the 2025 Scotland Good Food Nation Plan, highlighting how each outcome is linked to the National Performance Framework, Sustainable Development Goals and International Instruments.

Table 1: How the Good Food Nation Outcomes link to the National Performance Framework, the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Right to Food

Good Food Nation Outcome	National Performance Framework Outcome	UN Sustainable Development Goals	International Instruments[16]
Outcome 1 The food environment in Scotland enables people to eat well. Everyone benefits from reliable and dignified access to safe, nutritious, affordable, enjoyable, sustainable and age-appropriate food.	We respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally We grow up loved, safe and respected so that we realise our full potential		Article 11 of ICESCR Article 24(2)(c) of the UNCRC Articles 27(1) and (3) of the UNCRC Article 12(2) of CEDAW
Outcome 2 Scotland's food system is sustainable and contributes to a flourishing natural environment on our land and in our waters. It supports our net zero and climate adaptation ambitions and plays an	We value, enjoy, protect and enhance our environment We have a globally competitive, entrepreneurial, inclusive and sustainable economy		Article 11 of ICESCR Article 24(2)(c) of the UNCRC

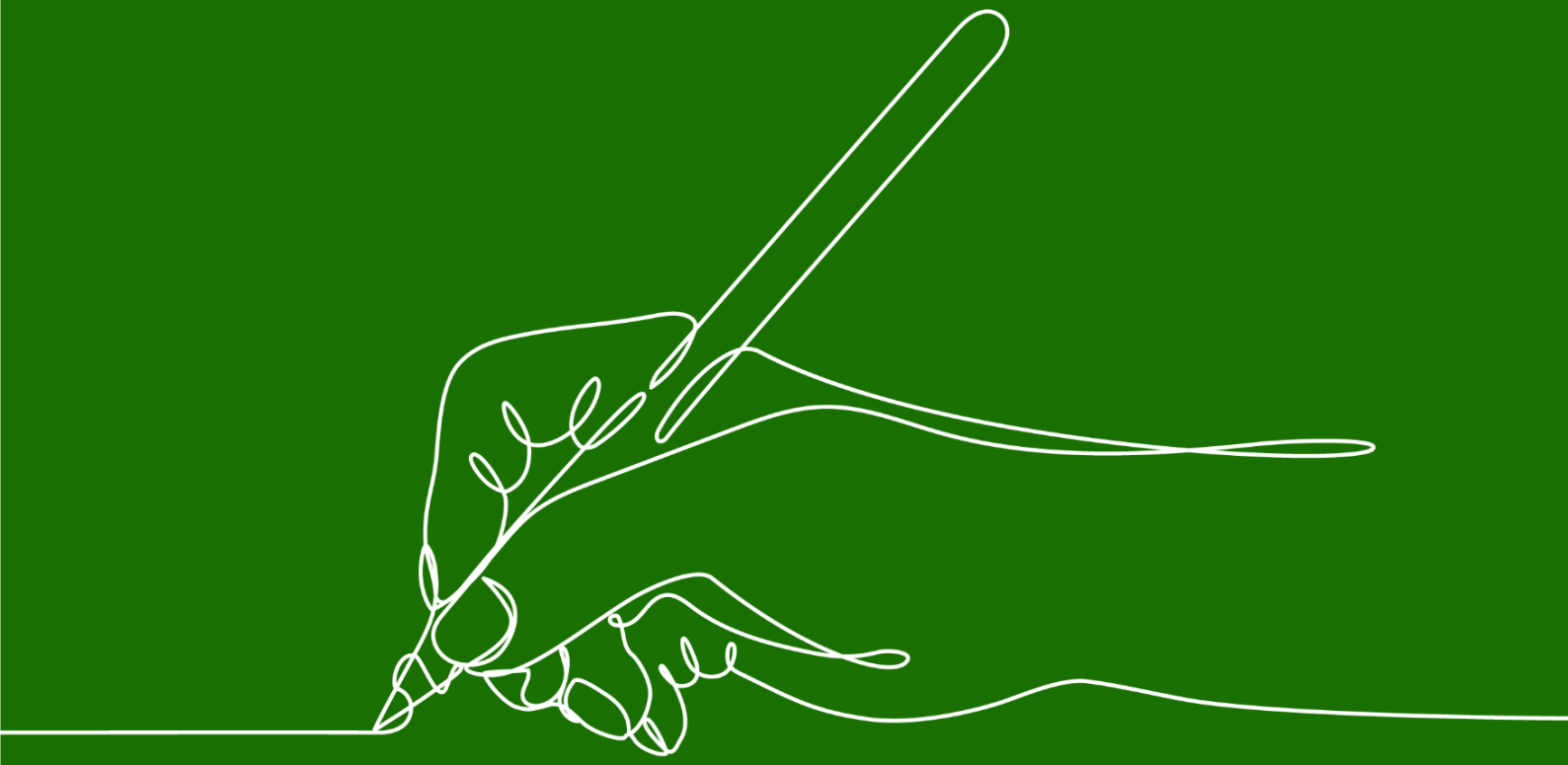
Reproduced from Table 1. In Scotland's 2025 Good Food Nation Plan (12)

Below is a table of indicators and targets linked with Outcome 1 of the 2024 Good Food Nation Plan. This table was not included in the revised plan laid before the Scottish Parliament in June 2025, but targets were listed in the Annex. The revised plan did include very detailed discussion of exactly which indicators would be used, and their data sources. However, displaying targets in this way, linking them specifically to each relevant outcome, may be useful for other nations going forward.

Table 2.1 Outcome 1: Everyone in Scotland eats well with reliable access to safe, nutritious, affordable, sustainable, and age and culturally appropriate food.

Scottish Government Policies	Indicators	Targets/other measures
• Agricultural Policy • Best Start Foods • Climate Change and Agriculture • Climate Change • Diet and Healthy Weight Delivery Plan • Early Learning and Childcare Meal Provision • Early Nutrition and Diet • Eating Out, Eating Well framework and code of practice for children's menus • Food Education • Food and Drink in Hospitals and Social Care • Food and Drink in Prisons • Food and Drink in Schools • Fisheries Management Strategy • Free School Meal Provision • Household Food Insecurity • Infant Feeding • National Planning Framework 4 • Public Procurement • School Age Childcare Food Provision • Scottish Milk and Healthy Snack Scheme • Sustainable Aquaculture • Tackling Child Poverty	• Proportion of households experiencing household food insecurity • Number of pupils registered for free school meals • Percentage of pupils present at school taking school meals (free or paid for) • Number of day care settings and children registered to the Scottish Milk and Healthy Snack Scheme • Proportion of children in Scotland living in: relative poverty; absolute poverty; combined low income and material deprivation, and; persistent poverty (after housing costs) • Scottish Dietary Goals • Proportion of public and private sector food businesses implementing the Eating Out, Eating Well framework and code of practice for children's menus • Number of local authorities that participate in the Food for Life Scotland Programme	• Fewer than 10% of children living in relative poverty by 2030 • Fewer than 5% of children living in absolute poverty by 2030 • Fewer than 5% of children living in combined low income and material deprivation by 2030 • Fewer than 5% of children living in persistent poverty by 2030 • Halve childhood obesity by 2030 and significantly reduce associated diet-related inequalities • Reduce adult diet-related health inequalities • Reduce the number of households facing moderate to severe food insecurity • Reduce the reported number of households accessing emergency food provision

Reproduced From Scotland's 2024 Good Food Nation Plan Table 2.1 (11)



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Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition

ABOUT GAIN

The Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) is a Swiss-based foundation launched at the UN in 2002 to tackle the human suffering caused by malnutrition. Working with governments, businesses and civil society, we aim to transform food systems so that they deliver more nutritious food for all people, especially the most vulnerable.

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