

Response ID ANON-AK3Y-RKS8-Z

Submitted to Food at the Heart of Our Society - A Prospectus for Change
Submitted on 2021-11-18 16:37:36

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Public Sector

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Food and Drink Business Development Centre, Ulster University Business School

Introduction

What is a Food Systems Approach?

4 Do you agree with taking a food systems, whole of government approach through a NI Food Strategy Framework?

Agree

5 Please outline your views on taking a Food Systems "whole of government" approach through a Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework?

Response Box:

A food systems, whole of government approach is critical. There are multiple interconnections between the component parts of the food system (policy, health, education, supply chain etc.) and this requires an integrative approach from government departments such as DAERA, DfE and their associated bodies. Government departments must not be operating in silos when making decisions that will impact other constituent parts of the food system.

While a holistic view is appropriate, it does potentially create scenarios where priorities may conflict – e.g. the economic performance of local agriculture versus the availability of local, affordable, healthy food. In such cases, there will need to be compromise/prioritization, especially in relation to the relative importance of economic objectives.

As stated on p.6 of the document, we agree that food cuts across the policy responsibilities of several NI Ministers however in recognition of this and to ensure the success of this framework it will be important to clearly identify key performance measures within each ministerial area that would inform and support the successful implementation of the NI Food Strategy framework.

Within p.5 of the document food poverty/access to food is mentioned – should there be a link to this within Figure 1 on page 7?

Strategic Context

6 What are your views on the strategic context identified?

Response Box:

The strategic context is logical and the pursuit of a more holistic approach is welcomed. It is appropriate that the Food Strategy takes into account the wider policy context (PfG).

It is good that the PfG outcomes are being used as a basis for this Framework as it means that performance measures relating to the success of the Framework's implementation will be consistent across these policies for reporting purposes.

Would maybe expect to see mention of the role of technology / digital within the development of a Food Strategy too.

7 From your perspective, are there any other NI government policy linkages which you feel are relevant?

Response Box:

The links to existing policies seem appropriate.

On Pg. 6. of the document a model illustrating the policies, their core pillars and how they integrate or align to the NI Food Strategy Framework would be useful.

Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework - Ambition, Scope, Vision and Aim

8 What are your views on the proposed ambition of the NI Food Strategy Framework?

Response Box:

The ambition to be a world class food region is challenging but achievable, given Northern Ireland's natural resources and food industry capabilities.

The ambition appears to be quite production/export orientated. To what extent does the stated ambition, recognize the movement of food into Northern Ireland and the related issues of food security, choice and carbon footprint?

In 2018, Northern Ireland was named the World's Best Food Destination at World Travel Market indicating that we are already being recognised as world-class food region based due to some of the key credentials listed within the ambition statement (e.g., quality products). The ambition lacks recognition of our region's innovative approach to food across the food supply chain including manufacturing and foodservice and how we need to continue to harness this collaborative approach to be recognised as world-class.

It might also be appropriate to broaden the scope of this ambition by placing emphasis not only on quality, ethical, animal welfare and sustainability standards but to also connect the consumer to this ambition proposing the development of a strong regional food culture, unique to Northern Ireland. By doing so this too could bring in links to hospitality and tourism.

9 What are your views on the proposed scope of the NI Food Strategy Framework?

Response Box:

The scope is sufficiently broad and importantly it recognises the role of the consumer.

The scope could also include "distribution" relating to supply chain management and accessibility of food which will become increasingly more prevalent as border checks and controls continue.

Within the scope, should there be a mention of how this soil to society approach could be research led given the number of NI Institutions focusing of food research across the food supply chain.

Within this scope there is no mention of how digital technologies could be used to transform this soil to society approach.

10 What are your views on the proposed vision of the NI Food Strategy Framework?

Response Box:

The vision is appropriate.

Within the vision statement should the term 'world-class' be included to align to you ambition?

Maybe within the opening line of the vision statement the following phrases could be included, for example, "An innovative and world-class transformed food system.....".

11 What are your views on the proposed aim of the NI Food Strategy Framework?

Response Box:

The aim is appropriate.

The fluency in the wording of the aim could be improved. For example, "The NI Food Strategy Framework aims to be a cross government strategy, with a shared vision, and priorities to help guide and support the strategic direction of all the players involved with our regional food system."

Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework - Strategic Priorities

Strategic Priority Two - Building Economic Prosperity

Strategic Priority Three - Building a Food Culture and Food-Conscious Society

Strategic Priority Four - Protecting and Enhancing Our Natural Resources

Strategic Priority Five - Building Healthy Lives Through Food Education

Strategic Priority Six - Building and Maintaining Appropriate Emergency Contingency Plans Across the Supply Chain

12 Do you agree with the proposed six strategic priorities?

Agree

13 Are there any amendments or refinements that you would like to make to these priorities?

Response Box:

In terms of partners, there is a role for universities, particularly in relation to the sustainable economic prosperity priority. There may also be a key role for food trade body associations such as Food NI for the food culture priority.

Priority one and five and, priority three and five seem quite strongly linked and may possibly overlap.

Further integration of these priorities (e.g., priority 3) could be incorporated in the vision/scope and aims of the strategy.

Priority one could include the term "Sustainable nutrition" which means ensuring wholesome, nutrient-dense foods are accessible, affordable and culturally relevant while also preserving environmental resources and supporting local communities. Refer to Sustainability in Nutrition? A holistic concept for science and seven principles for education | The Nutrition Society for the seven guiding principles of sustainable nutrition.

For strategic priority five, perhaps effective marketing could form a constituent part of education. Priority five has particular relevance to the advancement of the SDGs, which is welcomed (this sector has a unique role to play in increasing public awareness and impact within the area).

For strategic priority six, there are current challenges within the sector around work force planning and development (In manufacturing, retail, food service; distribution). This will require a holistic and concerted effort to address and a joined up approach from all stakeholders including educational providers. New approaches for the hard to reach communities are maybe needed. Also for strategic priority six, it may be appropriate to consider the shelf life of fresh foods (especially imports) as this is likely to correlate with waste. Also, to what extent could local diversification help with import substitution (and thus reduce carbon footprint, promote more profitability in local farming, etc.)

More specific measures of success for each priority area would add value to implementation of this framework.

14 From your perspective, are there any strategic priorities that are missing from the NI Food Strategy Framework? If 'yes', what are they and why?

Response Box:

The main strategic areas appear to be covered.

It might be useful to include technology/digital transformation and or supply chain management into one of the priority titles.

Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework - Decision Making Principles

15 What are your views on the proposed guiding principles to be used to guide the development of future policy interventions?

Response Box:

The wording for Principle 6, on 'people focused' is a little unclear. Perhaps could be clarified as to what 'people focused' means here.

16 From your perspective, are there any guiding principles missing? If yes, what are they and why?

Response Box:

The principles seem appropriate.

Given the complexity of the 'Food Systems' approach it may be appropriate to add a principle – Timeliness/Efficiency (to encourage responsiveness and agility in decision making).

17 Do you agree with the high level vision, principles and strategic areas contained in the proposed NI Food Strategy Framework?

Agree

18 Have you any other comments on the proposed NI Food Strategy Framework?

Response Box :

None

Implementation Approach

19 What are your views on the proposed approach to implementation, i.e. five year action plans will be developed and implemented in collaboration with key stakeholders and partners?

Response Box:

A five-year timeframe for action plans seems appropriate. Universities could be identified more explicitly as a stakeholder.

20 What are your views on the establishment of a Food Programme Board that is embedded within the governance arrangements for Green Growth?

Response Box:

Would seem appropriate to locate a Programme Board within DAERA but it will be crucial to ensure that the Board has cross-departmental influence.

21 Do you have any comments on future arrangements for engagement with stakeholders about implementation and delivery of the NI Food Strategy Framework?

Response Box:

The establishment of a Food Programme Board would be welcomed however it would be useful to have external partner institutions (e.g., universities and regional colleges) as members on the board or part of an external sub-group helping to advise/support the framework.

22 Have you any other comments on how to achieve a diverse and inclusive process for public engagement?

Response Box:

Fair representation of each academic institution should be evidenced across each working group.

Benefits to be Realised

23 Do you agree with the potential benefits to be derived from taking a Food Strategy Framework approach?

Response Box:

Yes, the core benefits have been identified.

Another benefit could be increased competitiveness of NI as a food producing region.

Rural Needs Considerations

24 Are there any rural needs comments that you wish to raise at this point about the impact of the NI Food Strategy Framework on Rural areas? Do you have any evidence that would be useful to Departments? If so, can you describe the evidence and provide a copy.

Response Box:

In terms of the economic prosperity strategic priority two, it would be important to take account of the specific situation of rural, micro size producers/artisans who face several market disadvantages due to location, size, resource, skills issues etc., and who may be 'invisible' to policy makers due to lack of market presence and a lack of engagement in public support. Academics at Ulster University Business have undertaken research over several years into small food producer engagement in public support, the barriers to engagement and the role of social capital and trust in fostering knowledge exchange. While the research has raised questions about the effectiveness of public support for small food producer innovation it did identify the critical role played by Government in fostering social capital and knowledge exchange and in acting as a bridge to informal networks. It also identified a policy challenge in providing tailored and targeted support that meets the needs of this group, and which would assist in the the growth of such enterprises. This work has been published in several academic journals. Further details on the findings are available here: McKitterick, L., Quinn, B., McAdam, R. and Dunn, A. (2016) "Innovation Networks and the Institutional Actor-Producer Relationship in Rural areas: The context of Artisan Food Production", *Journal of Rural Studies*, 48(C): 41-52. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2016.09.005>

Equality Considerations

25 Are there any equality comments that you wish to raise at this point? Do you have any evidence that would be useful to Departments? If so, can you describe the evidence and provide a copy.

Response Box:

26 Are there any environmental impact comments that you wish to raise at this point? Do you have any evidence that would be useful to Departments? If so, can you describe the evidence and provide a copy.

Response Box:

27 Are there any other comments you wish to make or any other evidence of need that you think Departments would find helpful? Please submit any evidence with your response.

Response Box:

Publication of Responses

Alternative Formats

Annex A - Strategic Priorities and Linkages

Annex B - References

Annex C - Glossary