



Scottish
Environment

LINK

Food Security in Scotland

Background

With a rapidly expanding world population and climate change threatening future world food supplies, concerns about sufficient access to food are increasing. Food security is “a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”.¹ The UK is judged as having high levels of food security, mainly because of our openness to trade though domestic food production levels are also high in comparison with much of the twentieth century.² Currently, lack of food security is largely an issue in developing countries and the major causes are poverty and restricted access to food rather than a lack of global food supplies. The issue of food security is complex and

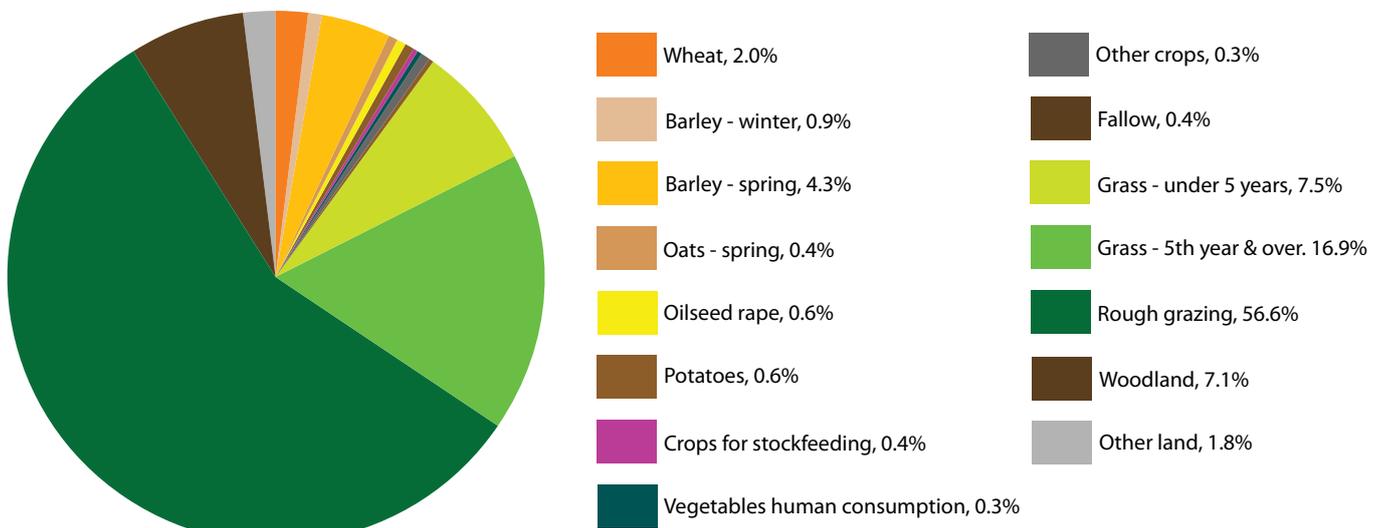


clarity is needed on the role that Scotland must play in addressing these issues.

Facts and Figures

- 84% of Scotland’s agricultural land is designated as less-favoured area – mostly pasture grazed by livestock;
- Direct support received does not reflect sectoral output e.g. cereal production accounts for 16% of the gross Scottish agricultural output, compared with 17.7% from horticulture and potatoes, sectors that receive no direct support;³
- A high proportion of Scottish food is not eaten by people: only c7% of the grain produced goes directly for human consumption⁴ – the majority is used for distilling/brewing or as animal feed.
- Over half a million tonnes of food per year are wasted in Scotland;⁵
- In 2008 66% of men, 60% of women and around 30% of children were classified as overweight in Scotland.⁶

Scottish Agricultural Production by Area



Scottish Environment LINK's views

As debate around CAP reform intensifies, there are attempts to justify maintenance of direct support on food security grounds.⁷ When the CAP was introduced there was an urgent need to increase food production at a time of food shortages and rationing, however the situation has changed. Subsidies to stimulate production were successful to the point of excess, demanding supply control measures. The dumping of excess produce on developing world markets had negative consequences for global food security, keeping poor farmers in poverty and hindering the development of productive agriculture. Although food production does need to increase globally in the longer term, our response to this issue will need to be multi-faceted. Making trade fairer for developing countries, by ending trade distorting subsidies in Europe and elsewhere, is part of the solution.⁸

LINK supports a significant shift in CAP support away from poorly targeted direct support towards more specific and targeted payments designed to deliver public goods. Public goods are defined as being

“non-rival and non-excludable” – the free market does not attach a price to them. Government intervention is therefore needed to stimulate their production. Food itself is a private good and its production should not be directly supported, though this does not mean that government intervention to improve the food supply chain can never be justified, eg, regulation to ensure farmers receive a fair price for their produce. Environmental goods and services are public goods. They are also fundamental for food security⁹ – without the natural resources of soil, air, water and biodiversity, agricultural production would itself not be possible.

Subsidising food production in Europe through the CAP will not achieve global food security. However, by redirecting the CAP to support the production of public goods and improving the environmental sustainability of our food production systems, we can maintain our long term food security. The Scottish Government also needs to tackle problems with food waste, encourage sustainable and healthy eating habits and protect agricultural land from development pressures.

Notes

1. FAO The State of Food Insecurity 2001 ; 2. Defra (2009) UK Food Security Assessment, <http://www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/food/pdf/food-assess-approach-0908.pdf> ; 3. The Scottish Arable Sector 2009 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/278281/0093363.pdf>; 4. The Scottish Arable Sector 2009 & Scottish Primary Food and Drink produce processed in Scotland 2007 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/08/29111522/13> ; 5 <http://www.wasteawarelovefood.org.uk/> ; 6. Health of Scotland's Population <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Health/TrendObesity> ; 7. E.g. Pack (2010) The Road Ahead For Scotland <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/11/03095445/8> ; 8. Foresight (2011) The Future of Food and Farming: Challenges and choices for global sustainability. Government Office for Science ; 9. IAASTD (2008) International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development <http://www.agassessment.org/>

The **file note** series is an initiative from Scottish Environment LINK to highlight and encourage debate of high priority topics of particular relevance to Scotland's land use. Published by Scottish Environment LINK, February 2011.

Scottish Environment LINK is a Scottish Charity, No SC000296 and a Scottish Company Limited by guarantee and without a share capital, Company No SC250899. LINK is funded by member body subscriptions and grants from SNH, Scottish Government and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

Design by Lynx Graphic Design

