

## **Food security**

There are many concerns about the costs and supply chains of our food, whether it is produced in Scotland or imported. How will the increasingly strained global geopolitical situation impact our reliance on imports? Are we unwittingly reducing our capacity to produce food at home by changes in land uses? How will climate change impact food production regimes? These and many other issues are of great relevance for the new government and for newly elected MSPs to address, as they have a profound effect on everyone as consumers and producers.

Food security is being undermined by a number of actions. First, we are losing food producing land for housing, economic development and infrastructure. This means land is lost forever for producing food. Second, the demand for growing more trees for commercial supply and reducing imports is resulting in transfer of land from food production to tree planting and timber production. Much of this is funded by unnecessary government grant aid as it is a commercially viable business. Third, there is increased demand for feed crops for the expanding beverage industries, specifically for whisky and gin production. Consequently, less of the grain crop is used to feed us directly, or for livestock which are ultimately farmed for our consumption. Fourth and more fundamentally, there are continuing concerns that the agricultural support funds are not addressing all of the issues vital for the stewardship of the soil and wider environmental processes and assets.

The Scottish Government consultation on the [Good Food Nation Plan](#) is a step forward in seeking to address at the strategic level the importance of food security for consumers and producers alike. Revealingly, the Parliament's Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's [scrutiny of the Plan](#) raised concerns around its 'quite siloed' approach, and the lack of detail on necessary cross-sector and cross-portfolio collaboration for delivery. This is hardly surprising as the government has a track record of not translating rhetoric into reality on the ground.

### **What is needed?**

All political parties as well as producers and consumers need to recognise that food security is an essential component of national security as a vital buffer against external geopolitical uncertainty. A number of actions should be taken to support this. First, the agricultural support funds need to stop financing commercially viable crop

production for beverage production. Second, the planning regulations need to have an added test of 'increasing food security' to judge whether transfer of land from food production to other uses is in the national interest. This could be done through amended guidance in the application of [National Planning Framework 4](#). Third, Scottish Forestry [guidance on support](#) for land transfer from food production to woodland and forestry expansion does not consider food security and should be critically reviewed and amended. Fourth, and related to this, the next [Land Use Strategy \(4<sup>th</sup>\)](#) to be published this month needs to provide clear guidance and direction on the balance of changes needed in land use for e.g. food, timber, nature and housing; to date this has been lacking. A single purpose approach is no longer viable; greater attention needs to be given to a multiple benefits approach.

Two other matters need to be addressed. Greater support should be given to Research, Development and Demonstration for food production both on land and off the farm alongside underpinning environmental processes. Side effects, such as reducing the greenhouse gas emissions from cattle and sheep, and extensive loss and damage to soils require new evidence based guidance to food producers. Finally, a mandatory Code of Good Soil Husbandry and Water Management should be introduced and applied to all owners of land in receipt of government agricultural support.

Professor Roger Crofts