

## NORTHERN IRELAND FOOD STRATEGY FRAMEWORK – HIGH LEVEL SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES

### Summary of Consultation Findings

The following is an overview summary of the consultation responses received to the consultation undertaken between 24 September 2021 and 19 November 2021 on proposals for a Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework. It is intended that the draft Framework following consultation will go back to the Executive to consider the publication of an agreed Framework for Northern Ireland.

No	Question	Support	Key Themes Raised
Q1	Do you agree with taking a food systems, whole of government approach through a NI Food Strategy Framework?	57 responses to this question. 81% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with taking a food systems, whole of government approach through a NI Food Strategy Framework	
Q2	Please outline your views on taking a Food Systems “whole of government” approach through a Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework?	57 responses to this question	81% of respondents were supportive of the approach. Some comments included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The approach must include local government, community and voluntary sectors, consumers, the food industry and third sector organisations</li> <li>• Need for sufficient resources to deliver the aims and priorities</li> <li>• Need to consider how differing departmental priorities and potential for conflicting strategies and policies will be resolved</li> <li>• Trade policy is missing from the Strategy.</li> </ul>

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Q3	What are your views on the strategic context identified?	There were 52 responses to this question. The majority were positive	<p>Respondents suggested the addition of reference to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proposed NI Climate Bill.</li> <li>• Draft Energy Strategy</li> <li>• Several respondents noted a diagram showing linkages/connections would be a useful communication tool</li> </ul>
Q4	From your perspective, are there any other NI government policy linkages which you feel are relevant?	There were 51 responses to this question. The majority of respondents felt that there were no other relevant government policy linkages to be added.	<p>While the majority were content there were no other relevant government policy linkages to be added, a few suggested gaps included;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other existing government strategies &amp; programmes</li> <li>• Local Council Strategies</li> <li>• Growth and City Deals</li> <li>• Climate Bill (under development)</li> <li>• Strategies (under development )</li> <li>• Cross border linkages</li> </ul>
Q5	What are your views on the proposed ambition of the NI Food Strategy Framework?	There were 54 responses to this question. Approximately 78% were supportive of the proposed ambition.	<p>Several respondents made suggestions related to the wording of the ambition. These have been grouped together:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many respondents highlighted the opportunity to be more ambitious and suggested wording such as “world leading”, “continuing to be world class” or “world producing”</li> <li>• Environment focused organisations commented that the ambition was too production orientated and suggested the need for a better balance between food production, health of the population and the citizen/ consumer. This was linked to views on ensuring better access to affordable, local, sustainable, healthy food.</li> <li>• Some respondents felt the ambition could be strengthened to reflect protection and restoration of natural resources and ecosystem services as well as the importance of food security</li> <li>• A skills organisation highlighted the importance of agri food to the local economy and suggested that the pivotal role of knowledge, skills and a highly trained workforce in fostering economic prosperity should be reflected in the ambition</li> </ul>

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Q6	What are your views on the proposed scope of the NI Food Strategy Framework?	There were 53 responses to this question. Approximately, 71% were supportive of the proposed scope.	<p>Several minor word changes were suggested which included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food distribution, packaging, supply and disposal should be specifically stated as being within the scope</li> <li>• The scope should be expanded to include an outcome that NI consumers will be better able to make informed choices about the food that they eat in terms of quality, health, society and the environment.</li> <li>• The scope should be expanded to recognise the export nature of the NI agri-food sector, and the environmental considerations of food arriving into NI from elsewhere.</li> <li>• The scope should be expanded to consider food as a human rights issue, as a key determinant of health and wellbeing</li> <li>• Explicitly mention the importance of ensuring that NI's food and farming system operates within environmental limits. The carbon agenda must be part of the scope.</li> </ul>
Q7	What are your views on the proposed vision of the NI Food Strategy Framework?	There were 51 responses to this question. Approximately 86% agreed with the proposed vision, 7% disagreed, and a further 7% neither agreed nor disagreed.	<p>Within the 86% agreement, some comments included suggestions on the wording/minor word changes. These included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The way the vision is written implies that only people who make informed healthy choices will access safe and nourishing food. - Consider rewording</li> <li>• Several respondents referred to the need to include "affordability" in the vision</li> <li>• Suggestion to include 'nature positive' or the creation of a 'nature positive food system' in the vision</li> <li>• Comment from one respondent that the vision implied that the current food system is broken; the food system will have to evolve to meet environmental targets and the provision of safe, nutritious and accessible food</li> </ul>

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Several respondents suggested that “environmentally sustainable” should come before “economically sustainable”</li> </ul>
Q8	What are your views on the proposed aim of the NI Food Strategy Framework?	There were 52 responses to this question. 65% of respondents agreed with the proposed aim, a further 31% neither agreed nor disagreed and 4% disagreed.	Comments received were mainly that the aim was too focused internally on government. Many respondents commented that the aim should reflect that all stakeholders, including industry will be effectively engaged, to ensure deliverable and ultimately successful actions.
Q9	Do you agree with the proposed six strategic priorities?	There was strong support for the six strategic priorities with 76% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with them, 19% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed; and 5% respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the strategic priorities.	
Q10	Are there any amendments or refinements that you would like to make to these priorities?	There were 59 responses to this question	<p>There was strong support for the six strategic priorities overall, with some comments made, mostly around the narrative and scope of the priority areas, Respondents suggested the following amendments / refinements should be considered.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It was recognised there are strong cross-linkages between some of the priority areas, in particular between Priorities 1, 3 and 5 and</li> </ul>

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			<p>some asked whether potential amalgamation would bring greater focus.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Priority 1 - Respondents strongly supported the message of affordability</li> <li>• Priority 4 – to include greater reference to carbon</li> <li>• Priority 6 – to refer to resilient supply chains / integrity of supply chains and the importance of food security.</li> <li>• Review and consider additions to the list of key partners listed per priority areas</li> </ul>
Q11	From your perspective, are there any strategic priorities that are missing from the NI Food Strategy Framework? If 'yes', what are they and why?	There were 53 responses to this question	<p>Respondents made the following comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would like to see access to talent/labour, and Knowledge and Skills strengthened within the framework.</li> <li>• The underpinning role of research, science, innovation and technology of science in enabling change and the importance of investing in science should be a priority. Research and Innovation needs are significant and will require high levels of investment.</li> <li>• Consider the inclusion of Fish and marine,</li> <li>• Greater focus on Climate</li> </ul>
Q12	What are your views on the proposed guiding principles to be used to guide the development of future policy interventions?	There were 54 responses to this question	<p>Most respondents agreed to the guiding principles and thought them appropriate for the development of future policy. They suggested that further elaboration of each, similar to the additional information provided for each strategic priority, would be useful.</p>
Q13	From your perspective, are there any guiding principles missing? If yes, what are they and why?	There were 48 responses to this question	<p>A number of suggestions were provided to expand upon the existing principles. These included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food poverty /A specific statement related to food justice</li> <li>• The importance of addressing resilience and diverse local produce</li> <li>• The importance of the entire food system in reducing our climate change impacts</li> <li>• Skills and people development</li> <li>• More on the economic principles and expectation of delivering value for money</li> </ul>

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public health – health in all policies</li> <li>• Innovation</li> <li>• Collaboration and Cooperation on an All-Island basis and UK wide basis</li> </ul>
Q14	Do you agree with the high level vision, principles and strategic areas contained in the proposed NI Food Strategy Framework?	There were 63 responses to this question. 73% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the high level vision, principles and strategic priorities. 1 private sector organisation strongly disagreed.	
Q15	Have you any other comments on the proposed NI Food Strategy Framework?	There were 47 responses to this question	<p>The responses were supportive of the Framework, with most comments related to how a Framework should be implemented. These included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The importance of wide scale stakeholder involvement in drafting agreed outcomes- local government, food industry, community and voluntary sectors, with the consumer voice firmly heard.</li> <li>• Long term funding and political commitment</li> <li>• Collaboration - New or enhanced collaborations between departments will require a review of current arrangements</li> <li>• Delivery needs to begin very soon, with appropriate policies adopted and committed to throughout government, and pilot programmes delivered.</li> <li>• Clarity on how fidelity to values and principles will be monitored during implementation</li> <li>• Greater recognition of the role of knowledge and skills and importance of economic support and development programmes for the food sectors</li> </ul>

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trade: need to be cognizant of the potential impact of future trade agreements</li> <li>• Creation of an NI food brand or geographical indicators underpinned by high environmental standards and clear labelling that are recognised in the market and by consumers would have potential to build a food culture within the region.</li> <li>• Health - Recognition that the development of a more plant-based diet is required to achieve the health and wellbeing outcomes for the Northern Ireland population, whilst understanding this does not threaten the existing meat and dairy sectors</li> </ul>
Q16	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	There were 53 responses to this question	<p>More than half of those who responded agreed with the 5 year action plan and felt that more detail on the actions plans is required. Some specific comments included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Robust governance arrangements with strategic leadership at Ministerial level will be required, informed by the best available scientific evidence and coordinated by an independent oversight group</li> <li>• There is a risk that the Food Strategy Framework will be “bogged down” by bureaucracy</li> <li>• Independent monitoring of action plans and delivery</li> </ul>
Q17	What are your views on the establishment of a Food Programme Board that is embedded within the governance arrangements for Green Growth?	There were 55 responses to this question	<p>There was broad support for the proposals, with a variety of views in relation to the details of the governance structures.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many commented that the detail was unclear, especially given that the Green Growth strategy is currently out to consultation.</li> <li>• Respondents reiterated that all NI departments and representative stakeholders need to be involved.</li> <li>• Broad agreement for the proposal that existing groups and representative bodies should be utilised rather than establishing new structures, with the caveat that any gaps need to be clearly identified to ensure inclusivity. Creation of a Stakeholder Food Forum was suggested by one respondent as an alternative to adapting existing structures</li> </ul>

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Board would benefit from independent and wider partnership working arrangements, which may include an independent chair, with a fully transparent appointment process</li> <li>• The creation of mechanisms to monitor the progress of the board and hold the board accountable.</li> <li>• Political leadership to ensure longevity of the strategy.</li> <li>• A further proposal suggested that the Food Programme Board should report directly to the Inter Ministerial Group</li> <li>• Some concerns were raised that environmental priorities would take precedence due to being embedded within Green Growth.</li> <li>• The importance of alignment between this board and other similar boards across the four nations was highlighted.</li> </ul>
Q18	Do you have any comments on future arrangements for engagement with stakeholders about implementation and delivery of the NI Food Strategy Framework?	There were 51 responses to this question	The majority of respondents suggested that the NI Food Framework Strategy provides a great opportunity for the NI Government to implement open government practices, based on transparency, participation and accountability. Respondents highlighted the practical need to ensure an up-to-date stakeholder list.
Q19	Have you any other comments on how to achieve a diverse and inclusive process for public engagement?	There were 48 responses to this question	The majority of respondents highlighted the need for as wide inclusivity as possible; experience has shown that, inevitably, sectors and organisations that are not involved will feel disenfranchised. In addition, the greater the diversity of views being represented, the more difficult it becomes to achieve a consensus that is meaningful and capable of achieving objectives. Individual suggestions included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Form a consumer feedback working party.</li> <li>• Involve young people in strategic decision making, a Youth Oversight Panel with access to meetings as observers;</li> <li>• Consider the voice of the consumer, e.g. the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland's Consumer Parliament;</li> <li>• Connect with people from different countries and cultural backgrounds who now call Northern Ireland home;</li> </ul>

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Q20	Do you agree with the potential benefits to be derived from taking a Food Strategy Framework approach?	There were 51 responses to this question. 49 agreed or were in general agreement	<p>Some additional benefits perceived were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Related to circular economy, sustainability and working within the limits of the environment.</li> <li>• Health - 'improved nutritional knowledge'.</li> <li>• Potential for increased competitiveness of NI as a food producing region.</li> <li>• Cementing Northern Ireland's place as a key supplier of choice to the wider UK market and other important export markets would be another beneficial outcome.</li> <li>• Greater supply chain transparency and public procurement.</li> <li>• Standard of living for producers</li> </ul>
Q21	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.	There were 46 responses to this question. 68% of respondents had no comments to make.	<p>Additional evidence provided for consideration included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The RSA Food Farming and Countryside Commission 'Our Future in the Land' report and the 'Lay of the Land' report for the NI inquiry <a href="https://ffcc.co.uk/library/lay-of-the-land">https://ffcc.co.uk/library/lay-of-the-land</a>.</li> <li>○ The Consumer Council is commissioning research into Food Mapping – establishing where there are food deserts and food swamps and who is at risk of not being able to access healthy, affordable and varied diets. The research will conclude in March 2022.</li> <li>○ Ulster University research (McClelland et al., 2021) has focused on creating a food poverty risk index for each Small Area (4,537) across Northern Ireland. Food Poverty Risk Index for each Small Area (4,537) in Northern Ireland. © Copyright McClelland, N., Furey, S., McKenzie, P. &amp; Hollywood, L. Ulster University (2021) <a href="https://twitter.com/DrSineadFurey/status/1384786187085287426">https://twitter.com/DrSineadFurey/status/1384786187085287426</a></li> <li>○ ABC Agriculture Survey findings may be of relevance.</li> </ul>

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Q22	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.	There were 43 responses to this question. The majority of respondents made no comment to this question	<p>Two particular pieces of evidence were received –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Gender equality within food manufacturing meat sector MBW-GENDER-REPORT-2020.pdf (meatbusinesswomen.org) and</li> <li>○ The Food manufacturing sector is the largest manufacturing sector in the UK according to this report: industry-at-a-glance-april2020.pdf (fdf.org.uk). It will be important for the strategy to address the diversity of the workforce.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Inequality in income and access to food.</li> <li>● The importance of lay representation (citizens) on any Programme Board to ensure that any action planning is truly co-designed was recommended. The use of consumer representation groups is necessary but not sufficient to fulfil this criterion.</li> </ul>
Q23	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.	There were 47 responses to this question with the majority having no comment to make	<p>Specific comments included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The strategy should consider emerging “food trends” which may have an environmental impact &amp; advice the NI public.</li> <li>● Climate, carbon, biodiversity, resource, water and waste impacts should be specifically mentioned. In particular how food is grown, what is grown, how it is marketed all have huge impacts and require investigation and thought to determine the optimal approach.</li> <li>● One organisation was concerned that the work being done by DAERA, in collaboration with industry, to develop strategies and policies that will enable the sector to meet environmental targets, could be compromised by the proposed Food Strategy Framework, if this Framework is implemented in a way which limits the ability of the agri-food sector to grow sustainably. Consideration of the global carbon footprint of food must be an integral component of the consideration of all foods. This requires a common protocol for carbon foot printing to be agreed and implemented as a priority.</li> </ul>

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Q24	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.	There were 54 responses to this question.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall, respondents welcomed the opportunity to comment and look forward to playing an effective role in this policy area in the future.</li> <li>• The challenges of implementation were highlighted on several occasions including the importance of being cognisant of other policies in this area, such as National Food Strategy (in England) together with the need for interdepartmental government working plans and budgets in NI to fully achieve the ambitions of this food strategy.</li> <li>• One respondent proposed a Health Impact assessment of the Framework</li> </ul>
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