Eating Better in the Nations

An overview of UK food policy 2026



Eating Better

Eating Better is a cross-sector alliance of over 70 organisations working towards a fairer, healthier and more sustainable food system, focused on more plants, 'less and better' meat and dairy. The Better by Half Roadmap outlines the route to less and better meat and dairy, providing 25 actions to be taken across 5 key food sectors to drive the necessary transformation in our food system.

Following on from our 2024 report Eating Better in the Nations, this policy briefing examines progress against the government actions set out in the Better by Half Roadmap, exploring the state of food policy across the UK through four key action areas:

1. **Deliver a cross-departmental food, farming and public health strategy**
2. **Sustainable and healthy dietary guidelines underpin all appropriate policy development**
3. **Make sustainable diets the norm throughout public procurement**
4. **Every child has access to a hot, nutritious school meal**

The wider context across the UK shaping food policy

The future of devolution and May 2026 Elections:
With the Scottish National Party (SNP) retaining power in Scotland and Plaid Cymru emerging as the largest party in Wales, there is a renewed potential for what strengthened nationalist mandates mean for the future of devolution and UK-wide food policymaking.



Climate worry: Recent heatwaves across the UK have led to a renewed focus on climate change. A recent report from the Climate Change Committee warns that the UK is dangerously underprepared for worsening heatwaves, flooding and drought, and calls for urgent action to strengthen climate adaptation.



A new Prime MInstister:
With Andy Burnham MP as the new Prime Minister, his commitment to devolution and electoral reform could provide changes to the future of decision making in communities.

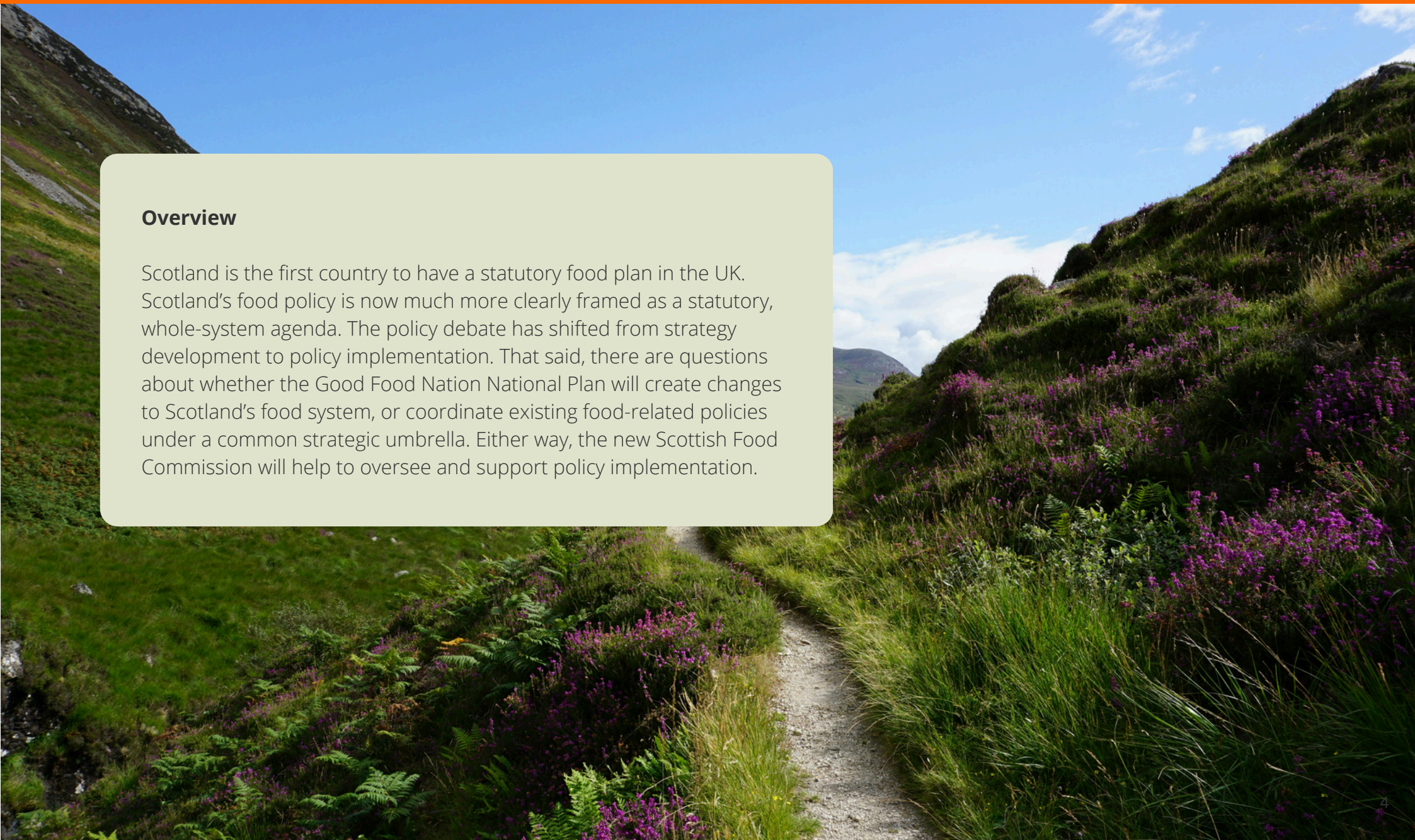


Rising food costs and the importance of resilience: The rising cost of food has underscored the need for governments across the UK to introduce policies that protect households from worsening food insecurity while addressing its underlying causes. As geopolitical tensions threaten further increases in food and agricultural input costs, there is growing recognition that securing long-term food security depends on building a more sustainable and resilient food system.



The below briefing summarises progress on food policy in each nation of the UK, and provides case studies from each nation where progress is being made.

Scotland



Overview

Scotland is the first country to have a statutory food plan in the UK. Scotland's food policy is now much more clearly framed as a statutory, whole-system agenda. The policy debate has shifted from strategy development to policy implementation. That said, there are questions about whether the Good Food Nation National Plan will create changes to Scotland's food system, or coordinate existing food-related policies under a common strategic umbrella. Either way, the new Scottish Food Commission will help to oversee and support policy implementation.

Scotland

Progress across Roadmap actions



Deliver a cross-departmental food and farming strategy

- **National food strategy:** Yes – Scotland is the first country to have a statutory food plan in the UK - Good Food Nation Act 2022. The National Plan, which fulfills the Act's requirement to set out national outcomes and the policies and indicators needed to achieve them, was published at the end of 2025.

- **Local food strategy:** Yes – The Good Food Nation Act 2022 requires all 32 local authorities and 14 territorial health boards to produce their own local food plans; despite guidance having been published, local planning duties have not yet been implemented.



Sustainable and healthy dietary guidelines underpin all policy development

- **Sustainable diets definition:** Partly – Food Standards Scotland now explicitly describes sustainable eating as a healthy, balanced diet that reduces environmental impact, and the Eatwell Guide is presented as a way to achieve a balance of “healthier and more sustainable foods”. But there is still not one single, consistent formal definition of “sustainable diets” across the whole Scottish policy framework.

- **Guidelines on red and processed meat intake:** Yes – Scotland still advises reducing red and processed meat intake to no more than 70g per day.

Scotland



Normalise sustainable diets through public procurement

- **Public procurement strategy for domestic supply:** Partly – there is no single standalone "domestic food supply" procurement strategy, but the National Good Food Nation Plan, the Scottish Government's Procurement Strategy and existing procurement guidance all support using procurement to increase the quality, provenance and sustainability of food.

Case study

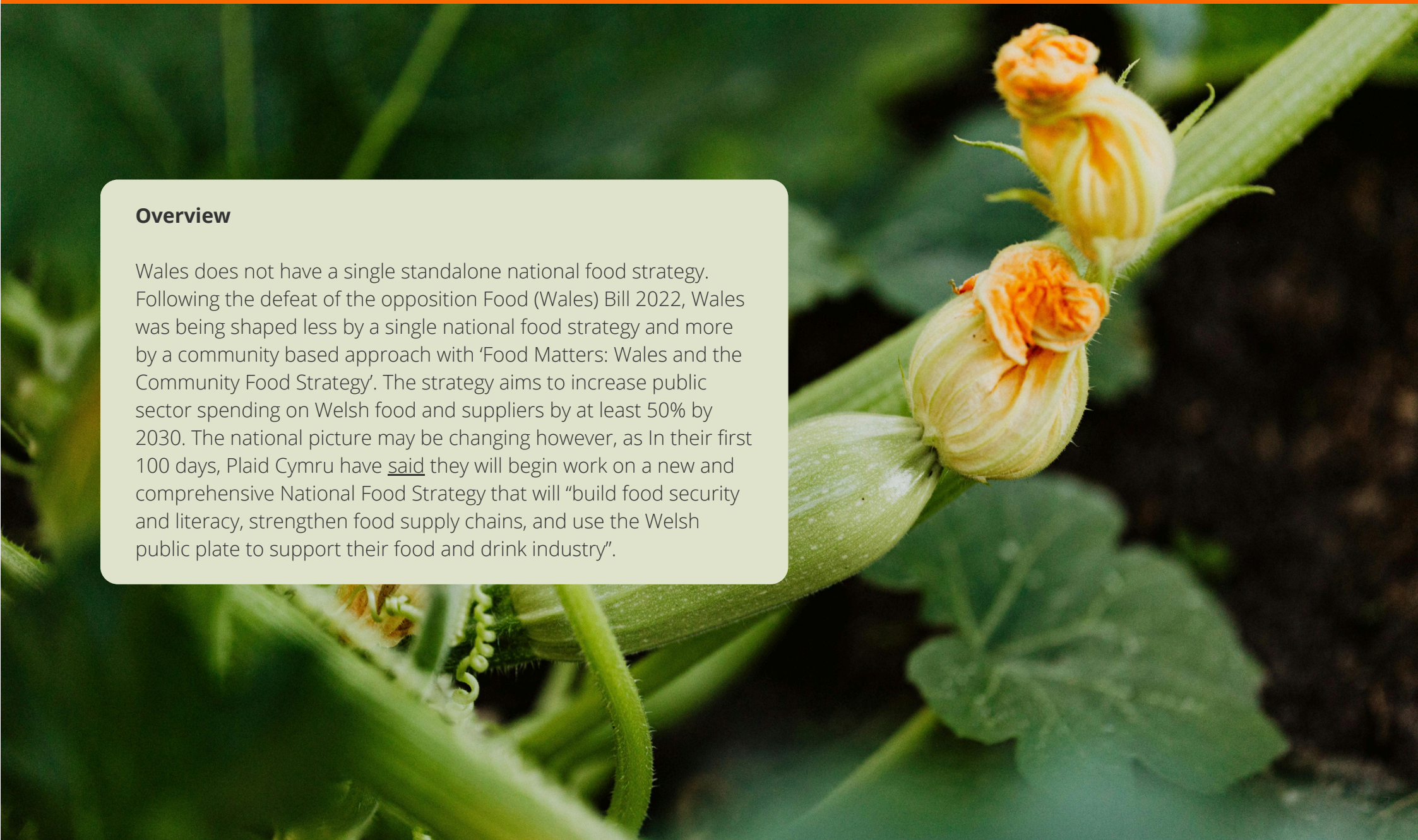
Scotland passed the Good Food Nation Act in 2022, a framework piece of legislation that was introduced after years worth of campaigning by Nourish Scotland and the Scottish Food Coalition. This required the Scottish Government to introduce a National Food Plan, the first in the UK which was published in December 2025. It also requires every local authority (32) and health board (14) in Scotland to introduce food plans, setting Scotland up to have connected local and national food policy. The Scottish Food Commission was also set up to oversee and support the implementation of local and national Good Food Nation policy.



Every child has access to a hot, nutritious school meal

- **Universal free School Meals:** Yes – universal free school meals are currently available in Scotland for children in Primary 1 to Primary 5 and in special schools, with additional support for eligible pupils in later primary and secondary years. In their first 100 days, the SNP have said they will deliver more school breakfast clubs on the journey to ensure every primary school will have a breakfast club by August 2027.
- **Fruit and vegetable requirements in primary school:** Yes – at least two portions of vegetables and one portion of fruit must be offered every day at primary school lunch.
- **Meat requirements at primary school:** Yes – No more than 175g of red and red processed meat is permitted over the course of the school week, of which no more than 100g should be red processed meat.
- **Fruit and vegetable requirements at secondary school:** Yes – at least two portions of vegetables and one portion of fruit must be offered every day at secondary school lunch and hostel evening meals.
- **Meat requirements at secondary school:** Yes - No more than 230g of red and red processed meat is permitted over the course of the school week, of which no more than 130g should be red processed meat.

Wales



Overview

Wales does not have a single standalone national food strategy. Following the defeat of the opposition Food (Wales) Bill 2022, Wales was being shaped less by a single national food strategy and more by a community based approach with 'Food Matters: Wales and the Community Food Strategy'. The strategy aims to increase public sector spending on Welsh food and suppliers by at least 50% by 2030. The national picture may be changing however, as In their first 100 days, Plaid Cymru have said they will begin work on a new and comprehensive National Food Strategy that will "build food security and literacy, strengthen food supply chains, and use the Welsh public plate to support their food and drink industry".

Wales

Progress across Roadmap actions



Deliver a cross-departmental food and farming strategy

- **National food strategy:** In progress - the new Plaid Cymru Welsh Government have made a commitment to develop a 'Food Strategy for Wales'
- **Local food strategy:** Yes - through the Community Food Strategy and the Local Food Partnerships network. There has been substantial investment into local sustainable food places; every local authority (22) has a local food partnership supported by funding from the government.



Sustainable and healthy dietary guidelines underpin all policy development

- **Sustainable diets definition:** No – there is no formal Wales-specific definition.
- **Guidelines on red and processed meat intake:** Yes – the Eatwell Guide recommends that the consumption of red and processed meat is limited to 70g a day.

Wales



Normalise sustainable diets through public procurement

- **Public procurement strategy for domestic supply:** Yes, partly — but not as a standalone food procurement strategy. Procurement is now a much more explicit lever in Wales's food policy.

Case study

Welsh Veg in Schools is a pilot project coordinated by Food Sense Wales that aims to get more organically produced Welsh veg into primary school meals across Wales, supporting organic producers across Wales and bringing multiple social, economic and environmental benefits to Wales. This project helps demonstrate how to increase the consumption and production of the horticulture sector in Wales, supported by the Welsh Government's Community Food Strategy and investment in local food partnerships. The expected forecast for 2025 was for 1 million portions of organic veg to be served in schools. More information can be found by Food Sense Wales here.



Every child has access to a hot, nutritious school meal

- **Universal free School Meals:** Yes – for all primary-aged children in maintained schools
- **Fruit and Vegetable requirements primary school:** Yes – at least 1 portion of vegetables/salad each day and at least 1 portion of fruit, fruit salad or fruit juice each day. From 31 October 2026: at least 2 portions of vegetables a day, 6 different types of vegetables each week, fruit served every day, and 4 types of fruit each week.
- **Meat requirements primary school:** Yes – meat cuts must be provided on at least 2 days each week. From 31 October 2026 - Yes – red meat at least once a week and no more than twice a week, and processed meat no more than once a week.
- **Fruit and Vegetable requirements secondary school:** Yes – at least 2 portions of vegetables/salad each day and at least 1 portion of fruit, fruit salad or fruit juice each day; a fruit-based dessert must be provided at least twice each week.
- **Meat requirements secondary school:** Yes – meat cuts must be provided on at least 3 days each week.

England



Overview

There have been elements of progress for food policy from the UK Government. There was a public consultation on applying the new Nutrient Profiling Model to address junk food advertising, while the March 2026 Land Use Framework for England gives the government its first spatial framework for balancing food production, nature, housing and energy. There was a consultation on school food standards and the launch of the Farming Roadmap in June 2026.

However, the Good Food Cycle, while setting out a positive vision, lacks the policy mechanisms and cross-government accountability needed to drive meaningful action. As highlighted in the Food Strategy Alliance's recommendations, a truly transformative food strategy requires clear commitments, coordinated action across government and robust accountability. Despite growing support from food charities and other stakeholders for a Good Food Bill, the strategy currently lacks the legislative underpinning needed to turn its ambitions into lasting change.

England

Progress across Roadmap actions



Deliver a cross-departmental food and farming strategy

- **National food strategy:** Yes - July 2025 saw the announcement of the Good Food Cycle food strategy, although there was no associated legislation.
- **Local food strategy:** No – there is no single statutory local food strategy. Delivery is place-based instead, through the Sustainable Food Places network of over 120 local food partnerships that develop their own local strategies and action plans, supported by England-wide policy such as the Good Food Cycle and by local authority procurement grants and pilots. No area is required to have a local food strategy.



Sustainable and healthy dietary guidelines underpin all policy development

- **Sustainable diets definition:** No – there is no formal government-wide definition set out across policy. The closest official framing is the Food Standards Agency's description of a sustainable diet as being more plant-based, with less red and processed meat and less food waste, while the Eatwell Guide remains the government's main healthy-eating advice.
- **Guidelines on red and processed meat intake:** Yes – the Eatwell Guide recommends that the consumption of red and processed meat is limited to 70g a day.

England



Normalise sustainable diets through public procurement

- **Public procurement strategy for domestic supply:** Partly – DEFRA is still reviewing and updating the Government Buying Standards, which are mandatory for central government and encouraged across the wider public sector. In March 2026 the government launched local food procurement grants to help councils source healthier, more sustainable and better-value food, with an ambition for at least half of public sector food to be sourced locally or certified to higher environmental standards.

Case study

The Soft Drinks Industry Levy (SDIL) is a mandatory tax on sugar in soft drinks for manufacturers (also known as the sugar tax), and was introduced in 2018. The Levy aimed to improve public health outcomes and incentivised drinks manufacturers to adapt their businesses and reduce sugar content in soft drinks by an average of 47%. The policy also improved life expectancy for children and adolescents, whilst raising over £2.2bn for the UK Exchequer since 2018. This example highlights how policy and regulation can be good for public health and the economy. Further information is available here from Sustain.



Every child has access to a hot, nutritious school meal

- **Universal Free School Meals:** No – England currently has universal infant free school meals for reception, year 1 and year 2. The Department for Education has said that from the start of the 2026/27 school year children in households receiving Universal Credit will also become eligible for free school meals. Some councils across England have gone further independently; for example, the Mayor of London funds universal free school meals for all state primary pupils across every London borough.

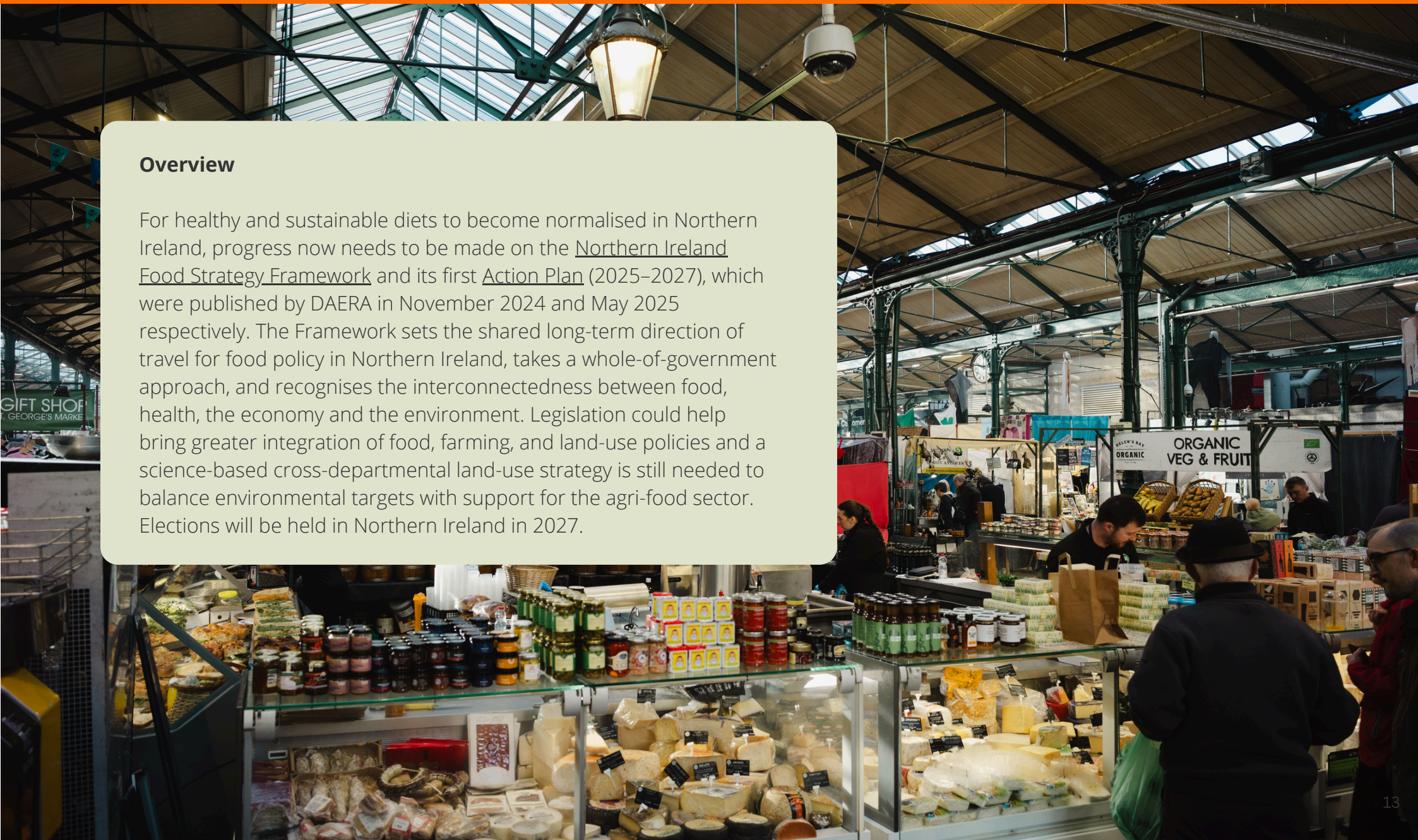
- **Fruit and vegetable requirements primary school:** Yes – current school meal standards require one or more portions of fruit and vegetables every day.

- **Meat requirements primary school:** Yes – school lunches must include a portion of meat or poultry on 3 or more days each week, but processed meat no more than once a week.

- **Fruit and vegetable requirements secondary school:** Yes – current standards require one or more portions of fruit and vegetables every day.

- **Meat requirements secondary school:** Yes – secondary school lunches must include a portion of meat or poultry on 3 or more days each week, but processed meat no more than twice a week.

Northern Ireland



Overview

For healthy and sustainable diets to become normalised in Northern Ireland, progress now needs to be made on the Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework and its first Action Plan (2025–2027), which were published by DAERA in November 2024 and May 2025 respectively. The Framework sets the shared long-term direction of travel for food policy in Northern Ireland, takes a whole-of-government approach, and recognises the interconnectedness between food, health, the economy and the environment. Legislation could help bring greater integration of food, farming, and land-use policies and a science-based cross-departmental land-use strategy is still needed to balance environmental targets with support for the agri-food sector. Elections will be held in Northern Ireland in 2027.

Northern Ireland

Progress across Roadmap actions



Deliver a cross-departmental food and farming strategy

- **National food strategy:** Yes - NI Food Strategy Framework was published in November 2024, with the Action Plan published May 2025.
- **Local food strategy:** No – there is no standalone local food strategy. Progress on local food is supported through partnerships between government departments, local councils, community organisations and the food sector, under the Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework. Local food initiatives exist through cross-sector food partnerships, including three Sustainable Food Place network members, but these operate on a voluntary basis and do not form part of a statutory local food strategy.



Sustainable and healthy dietary guidelines underpin all policy development

- **Sustainable diets definition:** Partly – There is a glossary definition within the Food Strategy Action Plan, not yet as a standalone cross-government dietary guideline. The definition used is broad and covers nutrition, safety, affordability, accessibility, biodiversity and efficient use of natural and human resources.
- **Guidelines on red and processed meat intake:** Yes – the Eatwell Guide recommends that the consumption of red and processed meat is limited to 70g a day.

Northern Ireland



Normalise sustainable diets through public procurement

- **Public procurement strategy for domestic supply:** Partly – There is no standalone procurement strategy for domestic supply yet, but there is a public-sector food procurement workstream in the Food Strategy Action Plan. The workstream commits the Executive to have a baseline for how much food is procured from local and Northern Ireland-origin businesses, identify opportunities to increase local sourcing, build local capacity, and make tendering more accessible to local food and drink businesses.

Case study

Belfast Food Partnership, a cross-sectoral partnership of over 23 organisations from across business, community, government and academia, was set up in 2023 as a successor Belfast Food Network. In The Belfast Way : A Strategy and Roadmap to a Thriving, Fair and Resilient Food System', the Partnership sets out their vision for Belfast's food system. This connects Belfast's food movement to wider food policy change, including the NI Food Strategy Framework.



Every child has access to a hot, nutritious school meal

- **Universal Free School Meals:** No – Free school meals (FSM) remain targeted to pupils who meet the eligibility criteria. The Universal Credit threshold for FSM applicants is £15,390.
- **Fruit and vegetable requirements primary school:** Yes – At least two portions of fruit and vegetables must be available per child throughout the lunch service; at least one portion must be vegetables or salad and one portion fruit. Fruit-based desserts must be offered at least three times a week in nurseries and primary schools.
- **Meat requirements primary school:** Yes – Red meat must be served at least twice and no more than three times a week; meat or chicken 'products' may be served a maximum of once a week.
- **Fruit and vegetable requirements secondary school:** Yes – At least two portions of fruit and vegetables must be available per child throughout the lunch service; at least one portion must be vegetables or salad and one portion fruit. Baked beans must not be the only vegetable option on any day in post-primary school.
- **Meat requirements secondary school:** Yes – Red meat must be served at least three and no more than four times a week; meat or chicken 'products' may be served a maximum of twice a week.

Conclusion

	Cross-departmental food strategy	Sustainable dietary guidelines	Sustainable public procurement	Universal healthy school meals
Scotland	✓	◐	◐	✓
Wales	✗	✗	◐	✓
England	✓	✗	◐	◐
Northern Ireland	✓	◐	◐	✗

Progress has been made on strategies, but delivery mechanisms are lagging behind: Every nation now has a food strategy in place or a commitment to develop one, but Scotland alone has a plan on a statutory footing – elsewhere, strategies exist without legislative teeth to secure them beyond the current political cycle. Public procurement illustrates the wider delivery gap: every nation has taken some action to capitalise on the opportunities public procurement presents, but this action remains partial and needs to be developed further and delivered in a more coordinated way.

Health is taking the spotlight over sustainability: While they could be more ambitious, all four nations have health-based parameters for school meal standards and dietary guidance. However, not one has a settled, government-wide definition of a sustainable diet, or dedicated policy to act on it. Without this, delivery mechanisms such as public procurement risk being implemented without adequately embedding sustainability outcomes.

Policy join-up is essential. Food is now firmly on the political agenda, as evidenced by the increased level of policy and strategy development across all four nations. However, these strategies must be co-developed and integrated alongside existing and new food-related initiatives — particularly in England, where the Good Food Cycle, the Farming Roadmap and the Land Use Framework are all under development at once.

What are we asking for?

We want to see the actions in Eating Better's Better by Half Roadmap implemented in full, across all four nations.

More specifically, we are working as part of the Food Strategy Alliance to ask the UK Government for a Food Strategy that can transform the UK's food system and deliver the Good Food Cycle vision — set out in full here. We also support the call for a Good Food Bill, which would put food policy on a statutory footing UK-wide – legally binding targets, ministerial duties, five-yearly action plans and independent oversight – mirroring the kind of legislative backing Scotland has already secured through the Good Food Nation Act.



Acknowledgements

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Eating Better