



Cork Food Policy Council Draft Vision for a Food Strategy for Cork 2025-2030

Cork Food Policy Council

The Cork Food Policy Council (CFPC), established in 2013, is a partnership between representatives of the community, food retail, farming, restaurant/catering, education, environmental and health sectors and local authorities in Cork. The CFPC was formed to build a partnership approach to work towards the achievement of a fairer, healthier, more secure and sustainable food system for Cork. The CFPC works in partnership to

- Influence local food strategy to follow best practice in developing a healthy, sustainable and resilient food system;
- Support new initiatives that promote knowledge, skills and experience around food;
- Advocate for innovative community food initiatives that seek improvements to the food system improving equitable access to quality food.

Context

While we pride ourselves that Cork is the food capital of Ireland, in reality, the food system, which feeds the city and surrounding region, has become dependent upon **long supply chains** that are increasingly vulnerable to economic, political and climate related risks, coupled with a rise in diet related chronic diseases.

Some of the issues that require our attention include:

Food Security: While the variety of fresh and processed foods available to shoppers today is unprecedented, food retailing relies heavily on global food supply chains. Today, Ireland **imports 83% of all our fruit** and vegetables while **domestic horticultural production has fallen drastically** over the past three decades. This is a time of growing geopolitical uncertainty and climate breakdown. Rising food costs and challenges to accessing a good quality diet (**food poverty**) are powerful reasons to take stock of our **food security** and consider the **resilience** of existing food supply arrangements.

Health and Wellbeing: In recent years, the levels of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer and obesity have been increasing globally and in Ireland, placing an enormous burden on our health system. There is almost universal agreement that poor dietary habits is one of the main drivers of this increase. In recent decades the shift in dietary patterns away from wholesome, unprocessed, fresh and seasonal foods towards more highly processed foodstuffs is linked to rising levels of chronic diseases including **overweight and obesity**. Ireland has the second highest level of people with obesity in Europe (26% of the population) above the EU average of 16%. It is clear that there are many complex factors contributing to this troubling development including the **marketing of cheaper unhealthy** products and the consequent **loss of skills** as time- and resource-poor households understandably choose food options that are more convenient.

Food Poverty: While we now spend less on food as a **proportion of total household expenditure** than at any time in the past, it is also apparent that increasing numbers of households across Cork are finding it difficult to put food on the table. Food poverty is a complex issue that is primarily determined by an ability to afford food and access to a good nutritious diet. Due to **rising food prices** and **income inequalities**, in many of our neighbourhoods in Cork convenient access to fresh foods has been replaced with unhealthy and ready to eat takeaway food and a growing number of individuals presenting at food banks.

Food Waste: The UN estimates that 19% of food produced around the world (equivalent to 1.05bn tonnes) was **lost to waste** in 2022 and in the EU this amounted to 59m tonnes or 132Kg per citizen. When we consider the resources used in producing such food (land, water, nutrients, energy, and labour) and the **resulting emissions** arising from its disposal, it is apparent that we must urgently strive to reduce such waste in pursuit of a more sustainable system.

Climate Change and Ecological Impacts: The current global food system is responsible for 35% of all the planet's **greenhouse gas emissions**, and that figure does not take into account emissions from transporting that food. Emissions come from both food production (especially from animal-sourced food and the production of synthetic fertilisers) and from food waste (landfilled food waste). Food production is also a major contributor to **biodiversity loss, freshwater use, water pollution, and deforestation**. As one of the wealthiest countries in the world, Ireland has a responsibility to tackle climate breakdown by reducing emissions of greenhouse gases. The national Climate Action Plan 2024 sets out a road map for working towards a **climate neutral economy**, while Cork City is also implementing an ambitious programme of actions to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030.

National Agri-Food Policy: The food production system in Ireland is largely part of the global food market with many areas of agriculture in Ireland becoming financially unviable for farming families; particularly in horticulture and arable farming. As a result, a lot of expertise is at risk of being lost in these areas. One of the key challenges confronting climate mitigation efforts in Ireland remains an agricultural sector based largely upon the **rearing of livestock**, especially cattle. While this sector has proven an economic bedrock, especially during the first two decades of this millennium, it is now proving an obstacle to reducing methane emissions – a powerful greenhouse gas – as quickly as circumstances demand. In order to ensure a **just transition for farmers** and building a sustainable and healthy food strategy for Cork it is essential that we embark upon a thorough **evaluation of the prevailing agricultural model** and policy tools that might enable a **diversification** into alternative arable and horticultural options. As an example, facilitating access to land for commercial small-scale vegetable growing is amongst those currently being considered. The growing exodus of farmers from horticulture, grain and dairy farming leaves a significant gap and loss of capacity and expertise exacerbating the risk of food insecurity in Ireland.

There is an urgency for **local action** in the Cork and surrounding region to build a more resilient local food system to meet these commitments. In support of **the Local and Economic Community Plan 2024-2029 for Cork City Action 1.1.3** the Cork Food Policy Council is developing a Sustainable and Healthy Food Strategy for Cork.

Vision

The vision of the Cork Sustainable and Healthy Food Strategy is:

‘A resilient, sustainable, healthier, and inclusive food environment in Cork’

This is one that

- ✓ **Facilitates our collective right to define our own policies, strategies and systems for food production, distribution and consumption**
- ✓ **Recognises our right to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through socially just, ecologically sound and sustainable methods (Food Sovereignty)**
- ✓ **Enables everyone to learn about growing, cooking and enjoying good food**

Goals



The Cork Sustainable & Healthy Food Strategy has five goals:

1. To ensure access to affordable nourishing food for all

Everyone in Cork city should be able to grow, buy, cook, and enjoy good food. Our actions will support widespread access, availability and affordability of healthy food for everyone.

2. To build a sustainable and resilient local food system

Good food fuels our body and plays a key role in human health, culture, livelihoods, communities, families. Central to this policy will be the preservation of our natural ecosystem on land and in the water, working in harmony with nature to promote biodiversity and resilience within our food system, while becoming more responsive to regional and global stresses and shocks.

3. A thriving local and diverse food economy

We will encourage a greater number & a diversity of food enterprises and jobs, making the most of our rich land & sea resources. We seek to facilitate the sourcing of healthy & sustainable food from local producers & suppliers, keeping value within the local economy.

4. Resilient community-centred food environments

Food is a very powerful lever for community development and engagement. We will support good food community environments that encourage a greater focus on nourishing food, while celebrating different food traditions. We will build a healthy food environment in Cork

5. Lifelong learning & skills

Everyone will have the opportunity to learn about good food – how to grow it, cook it, eat it, share and enjoy it. We seek to transform food culture by knowledge sharing and capacity building within organisations such as schools, hospitals, businesses.

How we will develop this Strategy

The following are our high level Goals and Ambitions to initiate this process. We are keen to engage on a broad level. Our stakeholder engagement plan is as follows:

1. Aug – December 2024

COMPLETED

Draft and launch the high-level vision of the Cork Food Policy Council on the Sustainable and Healthy Food Strategy for Cork

2. Mar 10 – April 30 2025

Online submissions are invited from all interested parties

3. March 2025 – May 2025

Stakeholder workshops with communities and partners in the food system including but not limited to;

- At least 4 community based workshops across Cork City
- Health Professionals and HSE staff working with food and nutrition including Public Health Nurses, Public Health Specialists, Dietician, Environmental Health Officers. Health Facility Catering Managers, Climate Action Officers, Schools Health Promotion Officers, Speech and Language Therapists
- Cork City Council staff including Climate Action Team, Community & Social Inclusion Officers, Planners, Parks Staff, Architects, Biodiversity Officers, Landscape experts
- Children
- Students and Staff in food related academic departments
- Small to Medium size Food Businesses in the city
- Environment Strategic Political Committee in Cork City Council
- Farmers / Growers and students of Permaculture and Horticulture
- Charity Food Sector
- Cork City Public Participation Network

4. June 2025

Collation and analysis of the feedback

5. September 2025

Development of a Citizens Assembly on the Sustainable and Healthy Food Strategy for Cork to identify priority policy areas.

6. October - November 2025

Drafting of the Sustainable and Healthy Food Policy for Cork

7. December 2025

Presentation and approval of the final policy to the Cork City Local Community Development Committee