

Cork City Council,
City Hall,
Anglesea Street
T12 T997.

20th June 2025

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

To whom it concerns,

Cork Chamber welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to Cork City Council on the development of Cork Food Policy Council's Vision for a Food Strategy for Cork 2025 - 2030.

Cork Chamber represents 1,200 members together employing 130,000 people throughout the city, metropolitan area and county. Our vision is to lead a transforming and ambitious Cork city and county, uniting, representing and supporting our members and community. Our direction is guided by our formal pledge to uphold the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). Cork Chamber has also been designated an SDG Champion by the Department of the Climate, Energy and the Environment for 2024 - 2025.

Cork Chamber's advocacy efforts are guided by the views and priorities of our partners, and shaped by our continuous engagement with members, our board and key stakeholders in Cork city and county.

Sustainability is at the heart of all Chamber activities, initiatives and advocacy efforts and Cork Chamber is committed to further integrating the SDGs across our work with businesses, charities and not-for-profits. Enhancing sustainability for Chamber members, as well as the wider community in Cork, is a key priority.

Food policy is a key cornerstone of sustainability policy, particularly in Cork, a city which was recently awarded the EU Mission Cities label for Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities. With ambitious goals to achieve climate neutrality in Cork City by 2030, it is vital that every aspect of policy and activity is considered in this regard. Food policy cuts across all sectors of activity and all members of society, from production and supply to consumption. Cork has an important opportunity to set an example in this strategy with regard to food policy and sustainability; solutions and ideas that are replicable and scalable are important to ensure we create a joined-up system for food producers in Ireland.

Against a backdrop of advancing climate change, addressing the food sector's emissions must be a priority, as well as promoting more sustainable food practices. Nutrition advice and supports should also be prioritised, supporting communities across the city.

Government, businesses, community organisations and other stakeholders all have a role to play in supporting this vision. A sustainable food policy for Cork can bring many benefits for the city region, helping to achieve climate goals and enhancing the region's overall quality of life offering, and competitiveness as a result.

Cork Chamber looks forward to continued engagement with Cork City Council and Cork Food Policy Council as the Food Strategy progresses, supporting the vision of a safe, resilient and sustainable food system for Cork.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cathal McSweeney', with a stylized, flowing script.

Cathal McSweeney

Director of Public and International Affairs

Feedback

1. What are the key issues that you feel need to be considered in a Food Policy for Cork?

As noted in the draft strategy, urbanisation is on the rise globally and city dwellers face a unique set of challenges when it comes to food systems. With Cork's population projected to grow considerably in the coming years, addressing these challenges insofar as possible in the meantime is critical. Transitioning from traditional food policies to a comprehensive food systems approach is vital, considering the social, environmental, and economic aspects of food production, commercialisation and consumption, while also providing citizens with healthy, nutritious, safe, and high-quality food.

Some of the key issues that should be considered in Cork's food policy include:

Supply chain vulnerability

Cork's current dependence on long supply chains can compromise its resilience, particularly as the global geopolitical, economic and climate outlook grows increasingly uncertain. Such dependence leaves both producers and consumers vulnerable to forces beyond their control. The promotion of local production within the city region should be prioritised by the new strategy, through initiatives such as urban farming, community gardens, Community Supported Agriculture projects, and support for small farmers and agri-food enterprises that facilitate shorter supply chains.

Food security, nutrition, and health

Food security involves not only the availability and accessibility of sufficient food to meet people's caloric demands but also their nutritional needs. Modern diets, particularly in highly urbanised regions, can often be overly reliant on cheaper staple, high-caloric foods that lack adequate nutritional content. This can also lead to hidden hunger, where caloric needs are met without a healthy nutritional intake. The promotion of food diversification should be prioritised by the strategy, particularly the availability and accessibility of nutrient-dense foods for all citizens. Diversifying the crops used in food production is also vital for food security. Supports for initiatives such as seed banks (e.g. Irish Seed Savers) and knowledge transfer regarding native and heritage crop species should be considered in this regard.

Climate change and environmental impacts

Agri-food systems are drivers of environmental change yet also remain highly vulnerable to the impacts of environmental changes. It is therefore essential to integrate both adaptation and mitigation measures into food-related policies. In Cork, like elsewhere, climate change poses increasing risks to food security and agricultural productivity. Changes in weather patterns, including more frequent droughts, floods and storms, can disrupt planting and harvesting cycles, reduce yields and aggravate the spread of diseases affecting key crops. Unsustainable practices in food production, processing, distribution and consumption also

continue to degrade natural ecosystems, through intensive farming, the overuse of chemicals, soil erosion and carbon emissions. In line with Cork's ambitions as an EU Mission City for climate-neutrality to 2030, it is vital that the strategy takes steps to mitigate the impact of food systems on the environment, promoting more sustainable practices in the supply chain. In parallel, measures to protect vulnerable production systems against the impact of increasingly frequent and severe weather events should also be considered.

Economic viability

Small farmers, local producers, agri-food businesses, SMEs and start-ups in the Cork region play a vital role in shaping a more sustainable and resilient food system. Future food policy must provide adequate supports for these stakeholders to maintain economic viability in the transition to more sustainable practices. This can be achieved through, for example, the promotion of market access, investment opportunities, business development support and fair pricing mechanisms that incentivise sustainable production.

Cultural preservation and diversity

As Cork is often celebrated as Ireland's food capital, it is vital the strategy prioritises the maintenance and enhancement of this reputation, encouraging the participation of all relevant stakeholders in the creation and implementation of Cork's Vision for a Food Strategy. Food producers, suppliers, restaurateurs and community groups working in the food policy all have a critical role to play in supporting Cork's reputation as Ireland's food capital and ensuring that the city region harnesses the opportunity to become Ireland's sustainable food capital, taking advantage of Cork's Mission City status to set an example for other areas to follow when it comes to sustainable food production and consumption.

2. Considering the Vision in the Strategy what if anything is missing that you feel is important for Cork?

Cork Chamber supports the proposed vision of a "resilient, sustainable, healthier, and inclusive food environment in Cork." The vision's ambition to facilitate the development of distinct policies and systems for Cork is particularly welcome, however consideration should also be given to the prevailing national and international trends and policy evolution in food systems. Alignment with national policies like Food Vision 2030¹, will be important in this regard.

The strategy vision's recognition of the right to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through sustainable methods is also welcome. Inclusivity should be at the core of the proposed strategy, ensuring that all groups and residents are supported in the journey to a more resilient and sustainable food system. In addition, the aim to enable everyone to learn

¹ [Food Vision 2030 – A World Leader in Sustainable Food Systems](#)

about growing, cooking and enjoying good food is also welcome, and opportunities for collaboration with businesses in this regard could be explored. Those involved in the food sector may be in a position to support communications campaigns to provide information regarding nutrition and food systems, as well as other initiatives like cooking classes and demonstrations, for example.

3. What are your thoughts on the Areas of Action in the strategy? Please provide your comments on each of the areas of action.

To ensure access to affordable nourishing food for all

Cork Chamber supports the strategy's proposed Area of Action to ensure access to affordable nourishing food for all. A thriving urban centre like Cork provides ample opportunities for partnerships and collaboration between community groups, businesses in the food sector and local residents and other stakeholders, and all possibilities should be explored to engage with communities and individuals who may otherwise be marginalised and therefore prevented from accessing affordable, nourishing food. Cooperation with Government agencies, educational institutions and community-based organisations should be explored in this regard. In a survey carried out by FoodCloud in July 2024, it was found that around 70% of community partners are experiencing an increase in demand for food and 23% are struggling to meet that demand². The provision of information on nutrition is also vital, and accessible communications campaigns should be pursued to support this goal.

To build a sustainable and resilient local food system

Enhancing the resilience and sustainability of local food systems is a key priority, particularly given Cork's position as an EU Mission City for climate neutrality and smart cities to 2030. Alternative food network initiatives should be expanded to reach more communities and incorporated into the overall urban environment, ensuring fair access and increased consumer engagement. The strategy should support the establishment of new urban food cooperatives that encourage shared ownership, inclusivity, and sustainability in food projects.

Taking steps to reduce food waste is another important element of a resilient food system. Strengthening partnerships with food banks, community groups and circular economy initiatives can ensure surplus food is recovered and unavoidable waste is composted or converted to renewable energy. Local procurement also plays an important role in enhancing sustainability. Prioritising the sourcing of food from local producers not only supports the regional economy but also reduces the environmental footprint linked to long supply chains.

² FoodCloud, [Food Poverty: Ireland's First Responders](#)

A thriving local and diverse food economy

Cork's food economy should celebrate and support its rich culinary heritage while fostering innovation and inclusivity. Supporting SMEs within the food sector is particularly important, including small producers, restaurateurs and local suppliers to enhance the resilience and sustainability of Cork's food system by encouraging local production and shorter supply chains, while also supporting job creation and the regional economy. A thriving culinary sector also helps to support tourism, attracting visitors to the region. Festivals and other events, such as Cork on a Fork, are also important in this regard and should continue to be supported by Cork City Council. Critically, a rich local food offering also encourages residents of Cork city and the surrounding region to spend time in the city centre and support the local economy. The local food scene is an important element of Cork's overall offering when it comes to attracting talent and investment to the region and should be showcased and promoted.

Resilient community-centred food environments

Creating resilient, community-centred food environments involves designing public spaces and initiatives that promote local food access, education and engagement. Cork can further achieve this by supporting small producers in surrounding areas, community gardens, urban agriculture projects, local businesses, and neighbourhood food hubs, where residents can grow, buy, and share food. Opportunities for partnerships and collaboration with local businesses should be explored in this regard, as well as employer initiatives that support more sustainable food systems among employees.

Lifelong learning & skills

Lifelong learning initiatives can help to build a food-literate and skilled population capable of driving sustainable change and contributing to the development of a sustainable and resilient food system. Partnerships with local businesses and agricultural institutions can provide training in farming, food entrepreneurship, and innovative culinary techniques, equipping individuals with the skills to make meaningful contributions to the local food economy. In addition to capacity building within schools, hospitals and businesses, volunteering presents an important opportunity for capacity building. Promoting intergenerational learning and community workshops will further ensure the transfer of knowledge, cultural heritage, and sustainable practices across Cork's diverse population.

4. Considering the Areas of Action are there any themes missing?

The proposed Areas of Action represent a comprehensive overview of the key themes that should be taken into account in the development of a Food Strategy for Cork. That being said, there are a number of areas that could be expanded upon in the draft strategy.

Collaboration with local businesses and business representative organisations can play an important role in supporting a number of priorities identified in the Areas of Action, and

should be integrated into the overall strategy. Businesses active in the food sector may have considerable experience and knowledge that can be shared with community groups and others to support the achievement of a more resilient and sustainable food system, and they may also be in a position to support the development and implementation of initiatives and events in local communities. Continued engagement over the lifetime of the plan should be prioritised.

In addition, the strategy could explore a focus on innovation. Support for food systems innovation, research and technology could further strengthen Cork's leadership in sustainable food systems. In this regard, an emphasis on the circular economy could also be considered. While food waste is addressed, a broader perspective on circularity could also serve to enhance Cork's leadership in climate action. Circularity can also support the use of food byproducts in new value chains, such as in bioenergy, further supporting the achievement of climate goals.

Finally, ensuring engagement and alignment with County Cork and its distinct food systems should also be prioritised to ensure a coordinated approach to food policy insofar as possible across the region, in line with national policy frameworks.

5. Any other comments/thoughts are welcome below

Food policy cuts across all sectors of the economy and all communities; it is critical that local stakeholders remain informed and engaged on the journey to a more sustainable food system as much as possible. In this regard, ongoing engagement and evolution should be prioritised over the lifetime of the strategy. This can be achieved through communications campaigns, across social media, local print and broadcast media, and public events and festivals.

Cork Chamber coordinates the Sustainable Cork Programme, which aims to explore key themes vital to support a sustainable and resilient Cork, empowered by a thriving business community. These events provide a platform for the exchange of ideas and shared learnings among businesses and those with expertise in various areas of sustainability. As part of the Programme, an event focusing on the circular economy was held in June 2025, exploring key themes in circularity including in the food system. Circularity across various sectors was explored, with a speaker from FoodCloud outlining how the organisation works to promote and support circularity in the food supply chain. Such events provide important opportunities to share learnings and knowledge, and promote opportunities to collaborate and explore more sustainable practices.

Tailored programmes that help organisations pursue sustainability at a local level should also be supported where possible. For example, Cork Chamber has partnered with Cork City Council to support the Local Green Deals (LGDs) initiative, supporting businesses to sign up to tailored action plans to accelerate the city's transition to climate neutrality by 2030 under the EU Mission Cities programmes. Businesses who have already signed up to the initiative include

some in the food sector, and further local collaboration should be encouraged to drive the growth of the local sustainable food sector. Cork's status as an EU Mission City should also be leveraged as much as possible to support the promotion of initiatives that support sustainable food systems, while also contributing to the achievement of our climate targets.