

Cross-Party Group on the Circular Economy

23rd February 2022 – 6pm

via Zoom

Present

MSPs

Maurice Golden MSP
Brian Whittle MSP
Finlay Carson MSP
Mark Ruskell MSP

Invited guests

Jon Molyneux (FareShare Scotland)
Renee Cardinaals (PhD Student, Wageningen University)
Kate Hopper (NFUS)
George Barrett (John Lewis/Waitrose)
Prof Derek Stewart (James Hutton Institute)

Non-MSP Group Members

Ailsa Judge
Beatrice Morrice (NFUS)
Cari Walton (Surfers Against Sewage)
Cat Hay (Food & Drink Federation)
Catherine Gemmell (Secretariat – Marine Conservation Society)
Catherine Gunby (Secretariat – Fidra)
Clare Cavers (Fidra)
Denis Mollison
Ewan MacDonald Russell (Scottish Retail Consortium)
David McIntosh (Dram Communications)
Jenni Hume (Reloop)
Mads Fishcher Moller (SRUC)
Matthew (Guest)
Michael Cook (Community Resource Network Scotland)
Phoebe Cochrane (Secretariat – Scottish Environment LINK))
Reeni Kennedy Boyle (Fyne Futures)
Paul Smith
Pete Ritchie (Nourish Scotland)

Sophie Brett (Secretariat – Keep Scotland Beautiful)
Suzanne Forup (Cycling UK)

Apologies

Ariane Burgess MSP

Agenda Item 1: Presentation from Renee Cardinaals, Wageningen University

- In the overall context of how to produce enough healthy food to feed a growing population, with reduced environmental impact. Need to minimise losses, make optimal use of residual products, avoid food competition, and reduce land use.
- Assessed what happens if the number of animals are limited to those that can be raised on non-competing feed sources – low opportunity cost biomass, such as by-products, food waste and marginal grasslands.
- Found that a diet that excludes all animal products requires more land than one with animals fed no low opportunity cost biomass.
- Also, that the types of animals vary in terms of their utilisation capacity – need to change to those that can more fully utilise available biomass.
- Dutch ministry is very active in this area, providing subsidies, experimental farms, education.

Agenda Item 2: Presentation from Kate Hopper, Climate Policy Manager, NFUS

- Assess and drive down inputs.
- Reduce discharges - precision fertiliser and slurry; close nutrient loops and prevent nutrient loss.
- Stop farm waste - energy, plastics, clinical waste, old machinery, oil, tyres, batteries, etc.
- Engage the whole system:
 - Consider wider impacts – wellbeing, economy, climate, biodiversity.
 - Local / on farm processing, local supply chains.
 - LULUCF and agriculture together.
 - Consider whole food value chain, imports and trade.
 - Food security - don't shift the problem abroad or to imports.
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This can be accomplished through:

- A collaborative approach and positive engagement.
- Baseline and benchmarking – carbon, soil, business so that we have a full understanding of where we are and direction.
- Support for innovation, expertise, training, access to new markets.
- Clear mechanisms to deliver a circular economy.
- Farming carbon as well as food.

Noted that NFUS is collaborating on many fronts. Called for an agriculture policy that funds the right approach and a supported rural economy which delivers a circular food system, mitigates climate change and biodiversity loss, within a sustainable supply chain.

Agenda Item 3: Presentation from Jon Molyneux, Fareshare

UK food waste is nearly 1 million tonnes per annum (2013). However, data accuracy is an issue, but breakdown of this figure is estimated at 60% household, 40% commercial. Attached to this are significant related GHG emissions. Disappointingly, positive trends seen during lockdown don't appear to have held.

There has been a significant year on year increase in food redistribution. Fareshare maximises the social value of surplus food by redistributing food that would otherwise go to waste – supporting over 750 charities and community groups and reaching 127,000 people.

France is often cited as advanced in terms of policy in this area with a ban on larger stores discarding unsold food.

Interventions that could help in Scotland: a statutory food waste reduction target, subsidy reform to level the playing field – (subsidies to AD plants mean other uses of food are often comparatively costly) and scale up successful interventions and infrastructure.

Agenda Item 4: Presentation from Prof. Derek Stewart, James Hutton Institute

Overall context is the need to preserve and enhance natural capital whilst meeting the demands of increasing population.

Analysis of Scottish bio-arisings shows the opportunities in terms of secondary materials that could be used.

One area is for sustainable alternatives to fossil fuel cracker products whereby crop wastes / co-products can be converted to sustainable bioplastics. Other opportunities include:

- Slurry and manure to energy and fertiliser.
- Straw to wax and feedstock chemicals.
- Straw to horticultural substrate.
- Vegetables to fine chemicals.
- Soft fruit to food antioxidants and colourants.

In Scotland we have many of the tools, technologies and infrastructure, as well as the feedstocks, to make bioplastics.

Publication to come out soon: 'Circular bioeconomy opportunities: valorising agricultural wastes and co-products'.

Agenda item 4: Presentation from George Barrett, Sustainability Manager, Waitrose and Partners

John Lewis / Waitrose partnership make every effort to engage with all players to reduce food waste.

Divide food waste into four principal sources: on farm, processing, own operations and at home.

For on-farm and processing food waste, both responsible for about 14% of food waste in the UK, Waitrose and Partners have a 50% reduction target (2018 baseline) by 2030 and a commitment to eliminate all avoidable on farm food waste. Activities include sourcing the 'less than perfect' lines and introduction of products that use surplus.

For their own operations, responsible for about 3% of food waste in the UK, they have a 50% reduction by 2030 target. Activities include FareShare Go roll-out, removal of best before on fresh fruit and veg trialled and advanced forecasting algorithms.

To counter at home food waste, about 70% of all UK food waste, Waitrose and Partners are partners in campaigns and provide material / guidance on how to reduce food waste in the home.

Waitrose and Partners stepped in to help farmers during the wool crisis last year when the price fell and wool was being dumped / incinerated. They started using wool for mattresses, which were also recyclable.

Constraints to further circularity include:

- Data – mandatory reporting would improve the quantity and granularity of data and enable responses.
- Valorising by-products – a database or other way of sharing information about by-product availability.
- Education – re-educate people – waste is currently endemic.

Agenda item 4: Discussion

Main points made:

Maurice Golden MSP – thanked the speakers for fantastic presentations in the context of the Good Food Nation (GFN) Bill, Circular Economy Bill and Agriculture Bill.

Brian Whittle MSP – there is a need to focus on where and how we process and consume food and vilify farmers less – farmers are circular economists.

George Barrett – Waitrose and Partners undertake waste hotspot analysis which looks at the value chain and the push and pull factors that trigger waste. A collaborative approach enables this to be tackled jointly.

Kate Hopper – with 1 million tonnes of on farm waste per year there is a need to look holistically and focus policies on labour shortages, new markets and local supply chains.

Derek Stewart – there are lots of opportunities, for example, bagged salads grown without pesticides (removing the need for washing) extends shelf-life by 3 – 5 days. We can get glucose from surplus bread and use it as feedstock for antibiotics.

Finlay Carson, MSP (convener of the RAINE committee) – The Good Food Nation Bill is a framework bill which compels the public sector to produce GFN plans, which the private sector will need to deliver.

Jon Molyneux – GFN Bill could be stronger to give it teeth. He supports the asks of the Scottish Food Coalition.

Derek Stewart – would like to see Government ‘walking the walk’ as well as ‘talking the talk’. For example on procurement, which could showcase good practice and support circular enterprises.

Renee Cardinaals – The Dutch government is really interested in showcasing good practice through experimental farms which support research and policy.

Pete Richie – Cattle in Scotland can be part of a circular system if there are fewer of them and it is an integrated system. Currently there is a large nitrogen surplus in Scotland, so farmers need to reduce nitrogen and become more circular cleverly. Mandatory reporting across the supply chain would really help. They need the right support in the Agricultural Bill.

Reeni Kennedy-Boyle – involved in a social enterprise on Bute where they support a number of circular projects but often come up against regulation that hinders progress. The local authority owns the waste and treat it based on cost in a silo way of working.

Final thoughts from speakers:

George Barrett – Waitrose and Partners have their own farm; used as a test bed for net-zero and regenerative farming. They are using circular transition indicators – data is a major constraint in this area.

Derek Stewart – the range of options is enormous and the food processing industry will respond. A scenario plan for the next 20 – 30 years is needed.

Jon Molyneux – We do have a choice and can do things differently – lessons from lockdown.

Kate Hopper – NFUS have committed to change through ARIEL and are collaborating on policy to deliver excellent food and reduce waste; but need to join up the silos, especially so that farmers can benefit from sequestering carbon.

Renee Cardinaals – We have heard about different ways that ‘waste’ can be used – we need collaboration and integration to ensure that it is used in the best way.

Maurice Golden MSP – thanked everyone for coming and highlighted the next meeting on the 11th of May would focus on an overview of waste with Circular Economy Minister Lorna Slater MSP in attendance. Potential of hybrid meeting, but a virtual option will always be available.