

Speech: Jim Mather MSP, the Scottish Government Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism

Reproduced below is the Minister's script for his food and drink speech. This is not his verbatim contribution.

The topic of today's symposium is "Sustainability in the Food Supply Chain". Sustainability is a key element for Scottish Government and, as you will no doubt be aware, sustainable economic growth is the single unifying purpose of our Government.

We are clear that we see economic success as the absolute pre-requisite for our entire programme in government. It supports and preserves the economic wellbeing of our country, creating a more successfully country; it underpins health of our people; the protection of our environment; and the strength of our communities, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish.

Economic growth goes hand in hand with more employment; more investment; and more innovation. It can transform the social prospects of all our people, in all parts of Scotland.

Our job as a government is therefore to create the best possible environment for business and personal success that improves the lives of individuals and families across all of Scotland. We are delivering this through the five strategic objectives of our Scottish Government – wealthier and fairer, healthier, safer and stronger, smarter and greener – which support our overall purpose of sustainable economic growth.

We have a clear and consistent aspiration for Scotland to do better. But, like all countries, Scotland is subject to changes in global economic conditions and markets. And we can't avoid that reality. But by laying a strong foundation, building resilience and adaptability, we can build a country that is better able to compete in today's global economy.

Scotland's success depends on building competitive advantage across Scotland's key sectors. The Government Economic Strategy highlights the food and drink sector as being key to achieving our growth potential and we are committed to helping create the best possible environment for the sector to develop.

Of course, any vision of Scotland's future prosperity must include a well-nourished population and profitable food industry. After all, food is everyone's business - it's one of the few things that none of us can do without. By creating the right environment for competitiveness and growth the Food Industry, as businesses and individuals, can work with Government in building a dynamic and growing economy in Scotland. Indeed, I know that Scotland Food & Drink have as their key priority helping to deliver an Industry worth at least £10 billion by 2017.

As we all know, Scotland is a land of food and drink. We have some of the best natural produce in the world. We produces an extensive range of world class products and the quality and sustainability of our products will ensure that they will continue to be in high demand throughout the world. Wherever Scottish food and drink products

travel, they stand for quality, for beautiful unspoilt landscapes, clear air, pure water and all the traditions of good, honest husbandry. These are the unique values that people everywhere associate with food and drink from Scotland and Scotland has much to be proud of in its produce.

Today Scotland employs 122,000 people in the food and drink processing sector of the industry and its associated supply chain. This generates £7.57 bn in sales Food processing alone accounts for one in five Scottish manufacturing jobs and more than a quarter of manufacturing exports. Scottish farmers and fishermen provide more than one third of our raw materials and are major suppliers to the wider UK industry.

This is an industry rooted in fantastic natural resources along with world class food- and drink-making skills.

These are strong foundations on which to build on and we want to strengthen the supply chain still further so that everyone - from fishermen and farmers through to processors, researchers, educators, trainers and public sector organisations – are pulling in the same direction.

As I have highlighted our industry has certain unique strengths with our premium and niche products. We know that consumers are increasingly interested in alternatives to low-price intensively produce products, and there are good opportunities for us to exploit these strengths in retail and foodservice markets, in the health-enhancing food sector, and in international markets.

But we are not blind to the challenges. The global food market is fiercely competitive. Countries such as Ireland, Denmark and New Zealand lead the way in many aspects of food production and processing. Consumers, retailers and foodservice customers are becoming increasingly demanding. Our farmers and fishermen face many hurdles and challenges not least that their industry develops in a sustainable way taking account of the challenges climate change present. Against this background it's perfectly clear that standing still is not an option for our food industries.

1. Our vision for food in Scotland is that it should make the nation healthier, wealthier and smarter with production making communities stronger and consumption respecting the global environment.
2. It is key for this government to bring a coherent approach to food as it impacts on the economy (rural and urban), diet and health impacts, production and consumption in terms of the greener agenda.
3. We fully recognise that there are multiple and complex issues to consider. We certainly do not have all the answers. Nor does the Government have a monopoly on good ideas.
4. Sustainable production and consumption of food is fundamental to the long term health and wellbeing of Scotland's economy and environment. Not to mention the health of its people.

We need more accurate information about the true environmental costs of the food we grow, cook and eat. In addition, we need clearer information about the Scottish capacity for self sufficiency in food production. This should all be taken forward in the food policy as it grows and develops into a plan for change.

Scotland now has an opportunity to provide international leadership and demonstrate our commitment to sustainable economic growth not just on food production, but on all manner of production and consumption.

Increased wealth and growing populations in developing nations has led to increasing global demand for food, and animal feed, at a time when the world has been looking at growing more biofuel crops to tackle the decline in world oil capacity.

On top of this, Climate change is impacting on crops and will continue to do so as the predicted frequency and severity of extreme weather events increase in years to come.

5. In meeting these challenges, Scotland's people have much to be proud of in it's past. Our explorers, entrepreneurs and scientists have contributed much to the modern world. That contribution far out weighs our size. While we continue to benefit from our past contributions our industries and lifestyles have contributed greatly to the position we now face.

6. Supporting and developing our food production capacity is in our national interests, helping build a sustainable economy but it must also be about putting our intellect and entrepreneurial skills to use to cultivate better and more environmentally friendly ways of producing food.

7. We have world renowned agricultural expertise on our doorstep in the shape of the Scottish Crop Research Institute, the Scottish Agricultural College to name a few. It is certainly within our gift to make a very positive contribution to improving food production capacity and developing sustainable food supply chains.

8. I am sure that everyone here today is aware of the national food discussion which has been ongoing. To succeed in today's globally competitive market; Scotland's businesses more than ever need to act with greater collective vision, with more consistent and coherent support from Government and our agencies. This was certainly very much the thinking behind the Government's launch of a national discussion on the need for Scotland's first ever cross-cutting food policy in January this year.

The interest that the discussion document "Choosing the Right Ingredients" generated about all aspects of food and food production has been notable and at the close of the discussion period on 25 April more than 25,000 people had visited our website and around 500 people had responded.

9. Their responses are wide and varied. Clearly there are major issues emerging such as climate change and education but there are also more subtle ones included about supporting local communities be they urban or rural and ensuring that everyone in Scotland gets access to the finest Scottish produce. I can assure you here that we will be looking at all emerging issues.

10. What happens after that? Well, we are considering carefully all the responses to the discussion document and what we have learned from events held to discuss and debate the potential content of a national food policy. We will form a view of what the next stage should look like and my colleague Richard Lochhead hopes to make an indicative statement at the Royal Highland Show next month, reflecting what we hear from the respondents to the discussion phase.

Together we can deliver increasing sustainable growth in Scotland. We all want to enhance Scotland's reputation for food and build strong working relationships which allow us to achieve this