

Constructing a dynamic database of local and national socio-economic indicators and outcomes related to the Scottish food systems.



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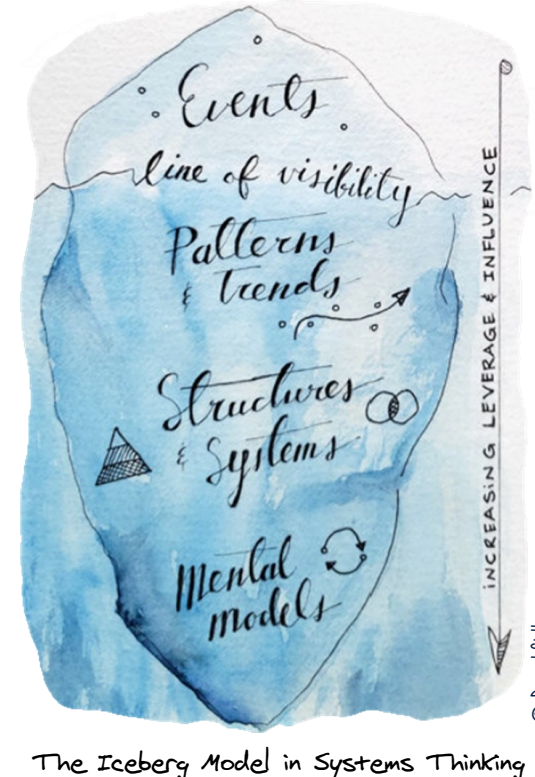
Background

Scottish food systems are facing increasingly severe, frequent and interconnected pressures and shocks. The multiple challenges of the nature and climate emergency, economic uncertainty, growing inequalities and diet-related ill-health require policy coherence to drive transition into fairer and more sustainable food production and consumption. The 2022 Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act provides a legislative base to tie together national and local interventions.

However, aligning the numerous activities, outcomes and drivers that affect both policy and practice is difficult. This is further complicated by variations in stakeholders' understanding and prioritisation of food-related issues, based on often conflicting values, relationships and powers. To create spaces where possible pathways for change can be negotiated, it is essential to identify the connections and barriers that may be leveraged. This research aims to uncover such levers through a broad yet in-depth examination of Scottish food policy governance.

Methods

The essential role of local authorities in food policy quickly emerged from a wider exploration of food-related outcomes across Scotland. To compare their respective profiles, a database of key socio-economic data was set up based on secondary sources and official statistics. Existing metrics were complemented by new indicators derived from thematic analysis of local strategies and activities related to food.



Further to the figures themselves, the quality, range and relevance of data were examined through a Systems Thinking lens. This approach pays particular attention to the changing boundaries, relationships, layered systems and multiple perspectives that are behind the ways different stakeholders engage with food-related issues.

Results

Below are selected *examples* of the existing connections (+) and missing links (-) identified during the construction of the database:

- Variable geographies: (+) coverage across scales for flexibility: *islands data dashboard; local research teams and resources.* (-) inconsistent boundaries limit comparisons: *obesity measured for NHS boards, not councils; agricultural regions from parishes*
- Production vs. consumption: (+) open data: *Food Data Transparency Partnerships* (-) dominance of agricultural OR manufacturing data and economic measures: *Growth Sectors Statistics incomplete for food, social or wellbeing not covered*
- Changing context: (+) API & real time updates: *Performance Networks* (-) Obsolete data & definitions: *hunger vs food poverty*

The database now covers 100+ metrics ranging from free school meals expenditure to food-sector businesses' prevalence, and spans from 2017 to present day. It is intended as a living and dynamic document that can continue to be updated and improved thanks to detailed methodological metadata. It will provide a strong basis for discussions around the development and monitoring of national and local plans under the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act.

National and local data on the Scottish food systems is like a patchwork.

A few scraps are missing, some are misshapen, others are already pieced together.

The Good Food Nation Act is an opportunity to tie it all in.



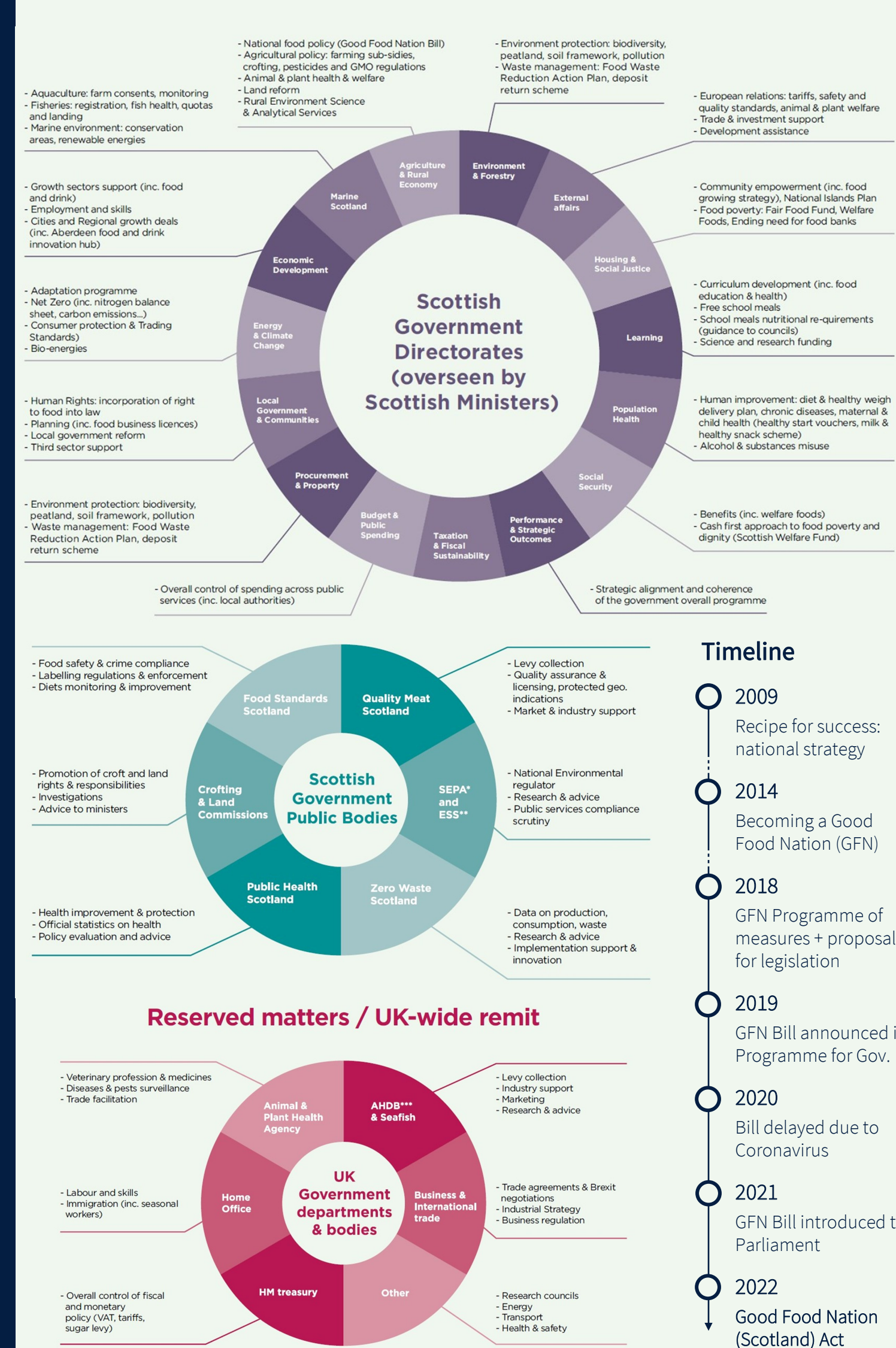
Want to see how this work is helping inform policy?
 Scan this code to download the 2022 report of the Scottish Food Coalition, which I contributed to.

The food system



Hawkes, C., Parsons, K. and Wells, R. (2019). *Understanding the food system: Why it matters for food policy.* City University of London: Centre for Food Policy.

Food policy in Scotland



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