

## 1. VISION

An Outer Hebrides where growing is supported, ensuring nutritious, locally grown and affordable fruit and vegetables are available to all.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015<sup>1</sup> set a duty for Local Authorities to develop a food growing strategy for their area, including identifying land that may be used as allotment sites<sup>2</sup> and other areas of land that could be used by a community for the growing of vegetables, fruit, herbs or flowers. The strategies were intended to increase provision for community growing, in particular in areas which experience socio-economic disadvantage.

The Outer Hebrides Food Growing Strategy will aim to improve the Outer Hebrides food system in the following key areas:



Third Sector partners have developed this draft consultation document, incorporating learning from a 6-month development programme, connecting with the “My Food Community” cohort of practitioners, national food partnerships and our local, grassroots, growing groups.

In October 2022 the Comhairle, NHS Western Isles and Hebridean Housing Partnership endorsed the formation of the Western Isles Food Partnership, led by Tagsa Uibhist, to work with Nourish Scotland’s, Sustainable Food Places programme. The Western Isles Food Partnership aims to unite our Communities, Public, Private and Third Sector stakeholders to reform all aspects of the Outer Hebrides food system; tackling the social, environmental, and economic issues surrounding food, to ensure that the Outer Hebrides is a Sustainable Food Place<sup>3</sup>.

The consultation on this strategy will ensure our Communities, Public, Private and Third Sector stakeholders have their views incorporated into the final Outer Hebrides Food Growing Strategy.

<sup>1</sup> [Community Empowerment \(Scotland\) Act: summary - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/community-empowerment-act-2015/pages/summary/), [Outer Hebrides Food Growing Strategy \(cne-siar.gov.uk\)](https://www.cne-siar.gov.uk/)

<sup>2</sup> [Part 9 of the Community Empowerment \(Scotland\) Act 2015 - Allotments: Guidance For Local Authorities Section 119 Duty to Prepare Food-Growing Strategy \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/community-empowerment-act-2015/pages/part-9-allotments-guidance-for-local-authorities-section-119-duty-to-prepare-food-growing-strategy/)

<sup>3</sup> [About us | Sustainable Food Places](#)

### 3. STRATEGIC AIMS

#### STRATEGIC AIM 1

**Support individuals and communities to identify land for food growing, food production, marketing and co-operation**

#### Background:

The Outer Hebrides, being a crofting area, has strong tradition of growing food<sup>4</sup>. We have several successful community growing projects across the islands, and this strategy seeks to support new and existing growers to identify space to create or expand their crops; get their produce to market; and work together to create a thriving local fresh food system.

This strategy aims to promote the benefits of food growing to the community, including:

- physical and mental health benefits; from encouraging outdoor exercise and connection with nature to increasing social interaction
- reducing inequalities by providing a cost-effective way for our population to access fresh produce.
- reducing waste and emissions in response to the climate emergency.
- economic development; through providing goods and services and developing skills

The Scottish Government Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement<sup>5</sup>, by virtue of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016, was refreshed in September 2022 to reflect the aftermath of the pandemic, the climate and nature emergencies and a deeply challenging cost crisis. The Statement called for a more diverse pattern of land ownership and tenure, with more opportunities for citizens to own, lease and have access to land to deliver a wide range of social, environmental, economic and cultural benefits.

The Outer Hebrides is now majority community owned. A significant proportion of Western Isles land is governed by Crofting law, which is widely considered to be complicated. Work on crofting legislation reform was suspended in October 2019<sup>6</sup> due to Brexit preparations, however this strategy is committed to support the Crofting Bill Group recommendations, including:

- bringing greater clarity to the legal definition of an owner-occupier crofter.
- enabling a standard security to be issued against a croft tenancy.
- expressly allowing for the creation of joint tenancies of crofts.
- providing the Crofting Commission with additional powers to determine who has a right to occupy a croft.
- a reconsideration of the constitution of grazing committees

Tagsa Uibhists, recent research report, “Small is Beautiful - Growing a Sustainable Local Food Eco-System in Uist”<sup>7</sup> also cited “Vacant and underutilised Land” as a key challenge identified throughout the semi-structured interviews they conducted in 2022 with over 60 individuals and groups across Uist.

It is important to note that not all land in the Western Isles is suitable for growing<sup>8</sup>, however, small tub and raised beds can produce surprising yields and should be encouraged in homes and public

<sup>4</sup> [Horticulture: A handbook for Crofters - Scottish Crofting Federation](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Scottish Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement 2022 \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Crofting Legislation - Crofting: national development plan - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Small is Beautiful – Growing a Sustainable Local Food Eco-System in Uist](#)

<sup>8</sup> [SNH Review 92: Western Isles Landscape Character Assessment \(nature.scot\)](#)

properties. Sheltered solutions, such as polytunnels, are suited to our weather conditions and those interested in larger, more diverse, growing yields. Local support to access schemes such as, the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme (CAGS)<sup>9</sup>, can build capacity within our community to grow a larger variety of crop.

## Key Objectives

The Comhairle will work with the crofting community and community landowners to:

- Identify land in the area that could be used for allotment sites; potential for sub-lets to diversify croft use in alignment with the proposed Agriculture Bill<sup>10</sup>
- Identify other land in the local authority area which could be used by a community to grow vegetables, fruit, herbs, or flowers.

The Comhairle will maintain an allotment waiting list, and report to government on:

- mechanisms to increase the provision of allotments or other land for community growing, should certain triggers be reached; and
- the application of new sites to communities that experience socio-economic disadvantage.

## STRATEGIC AIM 2

**Build on our traditional, sustainable local growing practices, ensuring locally grown, high quality and nutritious food is available to all**

### Background:

The Good Food Nation (Scotland)<sup>11</sup> Act underpins in law the work across Scotland to improve the production and access to local food. The Outer Hebrides has a reputation for providing high quality produce from the primary industries sectors, but output and employment from traditional farming activities has decreased markedly over time. The Islands Growth Deal priorities include product diversification and value added supply chains, with an increased focus on local growing and local markets. Supporting our farmers and crofters to adapt to the post-Brexit/ COVID-19 world, and to respond to the longer-term impact of climate change<sup>12</sup>.

The “Small is Beautiful” report and the Scottish Crofting Federation “Horticulture: A Handbook for Crofters and other small producers in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland”<sup>13</sup><sup>14</sup> recognise the long-standing tradition of sustainable horticultural practices across the Western Isles, born out of necessity as much as environmental conscience, dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

It is not currently possible for all items suggested in the Food Standards Scotland recommendations for a healthy and sustainable diet<sup>15</sup><sup>16</sup><sup>17</sup> to be grown, (in the quantities required for the whole

<sup>9</sup> [Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme \(CAGS\) - Crofting: national development plan - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-development-plan-2021-2026/pages/100-crofting-agricultural-grant-scheme-cags/)

<sup>10</sup> [Delivering our vision for Scottish agriculture - proposals for a new Agriculture Bill: consultation - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/proposals-for-a-new-agriculture-bill/pages/10-delivering-our-vision-for-scottish-agriculture/)

<sup>11</sup> [Good Food Nation \(Scotland\) Act 2022 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/1/section/1)

<sup>12</sup> [islands-growth-deal-heads-of-terms-english.pdf \(cne-siar.gov.uk\)](https://www.cne-siar.gov.uk/islands-growth-deal-heads-of-terms-english.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> [“Horticulture: A Handbook for Crofter” Scottish Crofting Federation](https://www.scottishcroftingfederation.org.uk/horticulture-a-handbook-for-crofters/)

<sup>14</sup> [Small is Beautiful – Growing a Sustainable Local Food Eco-System in Uist](https://www.eatwellyourway.scot/)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.eatwellyourway.scot/>

<sup>16</sup> [A healthy, balanced diet - British Nutrition Foundation](https://www.bnf.org/healthy-balanced-diet)

<sup>17</sup> [What is a healthy, sustainable diet? - British Nutrition Foundation](https://www.bnf.org/healthy-sustainable-diet)

population), in the Western Isles. However, maximising the potential for food production and reducing the miles our food takes to get to the islands, as well as reducing food waste, are valuable contributors to reducing carbon emissions. In a study published by Zero Waste Scotland, food waste accounted for 25% of household waste by weight, but 32% of household waste carbon impacts<sup>1819</sup>. Increasing local food growing will improve population health, but also contribute to the Comhairle's commitment to Zero Carbon Islands by 2045.

As mentioned, the Western Isles Food Partnership, is working towards achieving a Sustainable Food Place award<sup>20</sup> for the Western Isles. The Sustainable Food Places movement supports collaborative action between local policy makers, businesses, public and third sector partners and the community to enable a transition to a healthy, sustainable, and more equitable food system – including food growing. Strategic partners will work to harness the food and drinks industry potential to bring jobs and wealth to our communities, strengthening our community's capacity to produce their own food and ensuring our resilience.

The "Islands and COVID-19: a global survey" report highlighted the importance of food security in the islands, not just as an opportunity for individuals to access more local produce, but also as an opportunity to diversify the local economy.<sup>21</sup> However, for many small producers, the reciprocal nature of sharing gluts and informal trading of one produce for another will ensure everyone has what they need without monetary gain – in accordance with the principles of the Wellbeing Economy vision for Scotland<sup>22</sup>

### Key Objectives

The Comhairle Economic Recovery Strategy<sup>23</sup> approved in 2020 set a commitment to Community Wealth Recovery, including:

- Identify opportunities for products and produce to be created closer to the point of consumption, e.g. potential for increases in local food production and for that to be better integrated into the local supply chain and the local market.
- In support of local food production identify opportunities to restore a crofting / community food development fund

The Outer Hebrides Food and Drink Programme, which will support specific capital investments agreed as priorities with community landowners, aquaculture and fishing industry representatives including:

- Local food hub at Grogarry.
- Ice plant, chill facilities and other improvements at pier head to facilitate local supply.
- Community food hub / food growing projects.

In addition to supporting a Comhairle Community Food Development Fund, strategic partners will work to harness the food and drinks industry potential to bring jobs and wealth to our communities, strengthening our communities potential to benefit through schemes such as the Food Processing Marketing and Co-operation (FPMC) grant scheme<sup>24</sup>

### STRATEGIC AIM 3

Develop population skills and knowledge in horticulture, food manufacturing, waste reduction, biodiversity, composting and permaculture

<sup>18</sup> [Consider the carbon footprint of food this Climate Week | Zero Waste Scotland](#)

<sup>19</sup> [2018 Carbon Metric HH Brief - Final.pdf \(zerowastescotland.org.uk\)](#)

<sup>20</sup> [Sustainable Food Places Scotland | Sustainable Food Places](#)

<sup>21</sup> [Islands and Covid-19: a global survey \(2020\)](#)

<sup>22</sup> [Wellbeing economy toolkit: supporting place based economic strategy and policy development](#)

<sup>23</sup> [Economic Recovery Strategy \(cne-siar.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.ruralpayments.org/publicsite/futures/topics/all-schemes/food-processing--marketing-and-co-operation/>

## Background:

Our islands historically benefitted from a rich crofting and farming tradition where skills passed between neighbours and down through generations.<sup>25</sup> Modern lifestyles have changed that practice in some areas, but many local support organisations offer guidance and training on crofting and horticulture. This strategy aims to preserve the indigenous skills in our communities, whilst exploring sustainable and innovative solutions – as encouraged through the Agriculture Bill<sup>26</sup>. This strategy aims to nurture the many informal networks sharing skills and knowledge, link new members to these groups, and support the creation of networks where there are gaps in the islands.

The Islands Growth Deal<sup>27</sup> programme includes three joint-island innovation-focused proposals: low carbon technologies; creative industries and wellbeing, and skills and talent attraction. **The TalEntEd Islands Programme**<sup>28</sup> will fast-track the decarbonisation of the islands by creating opportunities for education, skills, entre and intrapreneurship and commercialisation supporting the increase in sustainable 'green' jobs across all three island groups.

The financial investment through the Islands Growth Deal will stimulate activity that will enable further investment and alignment of future resources. Most importantly, it will cement a partnership to better serve the islands. The TalEntEd Islands Programme will help the universities and academic partners on the islands develop new approaches that will be built into long-term provision and aligned to need, while attracting people to stay and come to the islands, responding to the demographic challenges and outmigration of young people, therefore contributing to our longer-term sustainability.

Led by the University of the Highlands and Islands, working with its academic partners and other universities (namely Robert Gordon University and Heriot-Watt University), the TalEntEd Islands Programme will be aligned to the UHI Islands' Strategy and Islands' Forum. Working closely with the Islands' Centre for Net Zero, and other joint and specific Islands Growth Deal projects, it will build the skills and talent pipeline needed, working with national and regional organisations, and paying specific attention to the inequalities broadened by COVID-19. The TalEntEd Programme will be supported with joint investment of up to £5.9 million from the Scottish Government and UK Government (SG £4.4 million/UKG £1.5 million).

Organisations such as the Scottish Crofting Federation have previously delivered vocational training to our communities<sup>29,30</sup>, as well as community groups and social enterprises such as An Garadh Barra, Cothrum in South Uist and Barra, Tagsa in North Uist, The West Harris Trust, Lewis and Harris Horticultural Producers, Horshader and The Hebridean Garden project in Lewis.

We want our young people to know where their food comes from and how it affects their health, the environment, and the economy. Our children receive education about food and health at school through Curriculum for Excellence<sup>31</sup> – we will work with partners to strengthen local learning opportunities such as community growing visits, healthy "farm to fork" cooking lessons and school growing projects.

The Good Food futures programme was launched in 2019 to give children a greater understanding of where food comes from and the many career opportunities available in the industry – therefore we

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<sup>25</sup> ["Horticulture: A Handbook for Crofter" Scottish Crofting Federation](#)

<sup>26</sup> [Delivering our vision for Scottish agriculture - proposals for a new Agriculture Bill: consultation - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

<sup>27</sup> [Islands Growth Deal – Islands Growth Deal \(islandsdeal.co.uk\)](#)

<sup>28</sup> [islands-growth-deal-heads-of-terms-english.pdf \(cne-siar.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>29</sup> [Crofting | Highlands and Islands Enterprise | HIE](#)

<sup>30</sup> [Training - Scottish Crofting Federation](#)

<sup>31</sup> [An appetite for education - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

will explore the possibility of localising this learning by exploring opportunities within crofting and fishing. Supporting our wider vision to retain our working age population.

The strategy will also support the development of skills in marketing, sales and export as promoted by Food & Drink Scotland<sup>32</sup>

## Key Objectives

The Comhairle will:

- **Harness the potential of the Islands Growth Deal to improve population skills in horticulture, food manufacturing, waste reduction, biodiversity, composting, permaculture and animal welfare**
- **Work with partners to maximise the potential for skills development in the local food system; including delivery of the TalEntEd Islands Programme<sup>33</sup> and the Curriculum for Excellence**

## STRATEGIC AIM 4

### Support dignified and inclusive emergency food provision

There has unfortunately been a need for local emergency food provision for many years, but this especially came to the fore during the pandemic, with many of our communities and agencies coming together to provide food for those in isolation due to COVID-19. There are now 12 established food banks/fridges in operation in Lewis, 1 in Harris, 1 in Uist and 1 in Barra – led by a combination of statutory and voluntary organisations and faith groups. Several groups who began as an emergency response to the pandemic have continued due to persistent demand for their services<sup>34</sup>

The rising cost of living indicates there will be a continued need for emergency food provision<sup>35</sup>. The Office for National Statistics September 2022<sup>36</sup> report showed a considerable increase in the prices of low-cost food items most bought by those on a low income, which is further compounded by the additional rural uplift suggested by “The cost of remoteness” report<sup>37</sup>.

The Scottish Government published its Draft plan on “Ending the need for food banks” in October 2021<sup>38</sup>. The approach set out in the plan was weighted towards prevention measures such as strengthening income and reducing the cost of living. Enabling our population to grow their own food significantly reduces their cost of living, whilst improving their overall health and wellbeing.

The Plunkett Foundation report<sup>39</sup> outlined a vision where the community control of our food production, processing, and retail is the best means of tackling inequalities in our present food system and ensuring access for all.

<sup>32</sup> [Export | Scotland Food and Drink](#)

<sup>33</sup> [islands-growth-deal-heads-of-terms-english.pdf \(cne-siar.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>34</sup> [Food Bank Contact Details \(cne-siar.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.jrf.org.uk/file/59294/download?token=0ApebtQy&filetype=full-report>

<sup>36</sup> [Tracking the price of the lowest-cost grocery items, UK, experimental analysis - Office for National Statistics - ons.gov.uk](#)

<sup>37</sup> [The cost of remoteness - reflecting higher living costs in remote rural Scotland when measuring fuel poverty: research report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

<sup>38</sup> [Ending the need for food banks - draft plan: consultation analysis - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

<sup>39</sup> [Plunkett-Foundation-Community-Food-Strategy-15-October-2021.pdf](#)

There has been recent success locally using the Hubbub Community Fridge model<sup>40</sup> where the community is accessing the service to reduce waste, reducing the stigma that can surround traditional food banks. Locally grown fruit and vegetables would improve the nutritional value of many of the offerings at our community food hubs. Schemes such as Fareshare<sup>41</sup> have made welcome donations of fresh produce that would otherwise go to waste, but community groups report that fruit and veg is often already spoiled by the time it reaches the islands.

Encouraging our communities to grow their own solutions to food insecurity, increases food citizenship, co-ownership, and improves wellbeing. This is evidenced in the research leading to the “Dignity in Practice” principles published by Nourish Scotland<sup>42</sup>. The following dictionary was co-produced with people with lived experience of food insecurity, to enable community food initiatives to be designed with the principles of service users as active citizens as opposed to consumers:



Figure 1 Nourish Scotland: Shifting to Citizenship

## Key Objectives

The Comhairle will:

- Continue to promote a community food approach to food insecurity, supporting “cash first” principles, such as the Community Cost of Living Scheme<sup>43</sup>
- Reduce the need for emergency food provision through investment of the Comhairle Community Food Development Fund

## STRATEGIC AIM 5

Access to food growing space and grown food is considered in all council policy and activity

<sup>40</sup> [Official Opening of the Stornoway North Community Fridge \(cne-siar.gov.uk\)](http://cne-siar.gov.uk)

<sup>41</sup> [FareShare - Getting Food](http://fareshare.org.uk)

<sup>42</sup> [Dignity in Practice Resources - Nourish Scotland](http://nourishscotland.org.uk)

<sup>43</sup> [Cost of Living Support \(cne-siar.gov.uk\)](http://cne-siar.gov.uk)

Current local policies and plans that relate to the sustainable food agenda:

Area	Strategies
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">NHS Western Isles Operational Plan</a></li> <li><a href="#">Active Hebrides Strategy 2019 -2030</a></li> </ul>
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Carbon Management Plan</a></li> <li><a href="#">Biodiversity (LBAP)</a></li> <li><a href="#">Climate Change Strategy 2022-2027</a></li> </ul>
Procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Corporate Strategy</a></li> </ul>
Waste	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Zero Waste Western Isles</a></li> </ul>
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Outer Hebrides Local Development Plan</a></li> <li><a href="#">Outer Hebrides Local Housing Strategy</a></li> </ul>
Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Corporate Strategy</a></li> </ul>
Whole Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Community Planning</a></li> <li><a href="#">Local Child poverty Action Report</a></li> <li><a href="#">Housing Land Audit</a></li> <li><a href="#">Outer Hebrides Anti-Poverty Strategy 2019-2024</a></li> <li><a href="#">Volunteering Policy</a></li> <li><a href="#">Islands Growth Deal</a></li> </ul>
Place Based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Outer Hebrides Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2017 - 27</a></li> </ul>

### Key Objectives

The Comhairle will:

- Ensure access to food growing is considered in all Policies and Strategies
- Identify opportunities for partnership working to improve access to growing space and locally grown food within all Policies and Strategies

#### 4. OUTCOMES

The above aims and objectives are designed to achieve the following outcomes:

Outcomes	Possible Indicators



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Increased space for food growing</li> <li>•Increase in locally grown food</li> <li>•Improved routes to market for community growers</li> <li>•Improved access to fresh produce</li> <li>•locally grown food is affordable for all</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No of new allotments/croft apportionments created</li> <li>• No. of growers selling produce</li> <li>• No. of local shops/ community vending machines stocking locally grown produce</li> <li>• No of people using emergency food services reduced</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
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## 5. ACTIONS

This strategy is a multi-stakeholder strategy; therefore, actions will be agreed at a series of stakeholder meetings.

## 6. RESOURCES

This strategy will require multiple stakeholders to be committed to the outcomes. There will be no additional staff hired by the Comhairle, the strategy will be enacted by existing staff and budgets with support from Third Sector Partners and external funding, which is currently being sought, from sources including Investing in Communities and Nourish Scotland. The strategy will be overseen by Economic Development.

## 7. COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION

This Good Food Policy will be built on the views of strategic partners, community groups, staff and existing legislation and guidance. Relevant stakeholders will have the opportunity to contribute to in-person and online consultations. Community involvement and empowerment must be at the heart of the Western Isles Food Partnership, and the continued consultation on food related issues will be the responsibility of the WI Food Partnership, reporting to the Community Planning Partnership for enactment. The strategy will require extensive involvement with the Private Sector, including the Crofting and Agricultural Community.