

Church of Scotland
Church and Society Council

GIVE US OUR DAILY BREAD

Summary

The Church has a continuing interest in food and agriculture. This report reviews some of the main issues, including international developments, the increasing power of the supermarkets in Scotland, and our spiritual alienation from the land. The report asks 'What can congregations do to respond to these challenges?' It suggests that members of congregations should think carefully about the food they eat and where possible get involved by growing their own food, buying local or working with local food projects and farmers.

The Gift of Food

The Church of Scotland believes that caring for God's earth and all creation is a fundamental Christian responsibility. As a member I undertake to "think global and act local" with respect to my own footprint on the planet; I will pray for guidance and act in the following ways whenever I can:

- T Thank God for his gifts
- H Harvest food with care for the earth
- E Eliminate waste from over-shopping and over-catering

- G Grow my own food if I can
- I Increase the amount of locally grown food I buy
- F Fairtrade - support Fairtrade when buying imported foods
- T Take time to taste and enjoy all food I am offered or make

- O Offer hospitality at my table
- F Find out the story of the food that I buy. Where is it grown? What is my impact on the grower's quality of life?

- F Fair prices and support for local farmers
- O Organic food – what do I think about it?
- O Over-indulgence – how much food do I need for a balanced diet?
- D Donate or share any surplus harvests or food I might have.

Introduction

Food is more than eating to provide fuel for the body; a meal sustains us physically, mentally, emotionally and socially. Food is a gift; a blessing upon which we all depend. Food from production to cooking and eating has great economic and environmental importance; what we eat affects the lives of others locally and globally and the health of the earth. How we live and eat profoundly connects us to the rest of the world. For all these reasons members of congregations can become better informed about the food they eat, where it comes from and how it was grown. This report explores some of these issues and their importance to congregations. It commends the growing number of food projects in churches around Scotland and makes recommendations for all congregations to participate in related ventures.

Previous deliverances of the General Assembly

The General Assembly has considered food and agriculture before. In 2002 it agreed deliverances to

- Affirm the importance of moving to more sustainable forms of agriculture, including both integrated and organic farming systems.
- Urge the Government to provide more incentives and assistance for farmers to do so, and to submit the health & nutritional claims of organic agriculture to independent scientific research & evaluation.
- Encourage members to adopt more sustainable food purchasing practices, as far as they are able, emphasising food which is seasonal, grown locally & uses more environmentally sustainable methods.

In 2007 it debated the subject of 'Fairtrade in Food', examining the world trade in food and its impact on developing countries; the role of the Common Agricultural Policy and the power of the supermarkets. The 2007 report concluded by expressing strong support for Fair Trade and urging church members to support both this and trade justice. This report to the General Assembly 2012 takes forward these discussions and in particular asks the question 'what can congregations do?'



What does this mean for congregations in the twenty first century?

Throughout the Old and New Testaments food and eating together are part of worship and faith. In the Passover meal, in the story of Ruth gathering grain from the fields after the harvest has been collected, in the dietary rules of the Old Testament the connection between land, food and faith is very clear. The central role of bread and wine in the communion service recognises the central role of food and social interaction in the Christian gospel.

Every time we buy food we are linked to the farmer, the farm and the earth and to each other. Food can create powerful bonds between people and the earth but many living in towns and cities feel insulated or even alienated from the earth and the farms that provide our food. As Christians we need to be aware of the sacred importance of the gift of food – its source and its journey to our plates.

“God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of

the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so.”
(Genesis 1, 29-31, NRSV)

In Genesis and throughout the Bible food is described as a gift from God but when we are shopping in a supermarket the items on the shelves appear to be more like commodities than gifts. We need to understand that food is not just a cheap commodity but also a gift; part of this understanding is in the preparation of food itself; taking raw ingredients to make a meal rather than using ready made dishes. Shopping is not just a matter of getting the best bargain but the best “treasure” that will be good for our health and caring for the environment. In many instances the cheapest and healthiest items are fresh vegetables of the season but if we lack the skill and knowledge to prepare and cook them then we deny ourselves this best option.



Connecting to the land

The connection of people to the land upon which they lived and worked was central to understanding many aspects of Jesus’ teachings. Jesus used everyday language and imagery, and his audience would have understood His many references to seeds and sowing, vines and vineyards, trees and fruit, harvest and workers. People were connected to the land, and in the case of Galilee, also to the sea and its harvest.

Our scriptures were written by people connected to their land, recording teachings that assumed a connection to the land and subsistence from the land. If many of us in the “developed” world have now lost that connection, there is a risk that parts of those scriptures no longer make as much sense. When Jesus talks of wine and wineskins; of mustard seeds and trees, do we understand? The tensions expressed in these stories may still be evident in many other places in the world but have been lost to us.



The contemporary urban consumer is distanced from aspects of the narrative that have shaped our church. For example some urban children believe that milk comes from cartons not cows and that tuna fish are small because they are packed in cans. Our disconnection from the land separates us from the creation in which we live and in which God’s Spirit moves. God has been described as revealing Himself through two books – Scripture and His Creation (see Rom 1:20-21, Ps 19:1-4). If

we have become alienated from the rest of Creation, unable to see God’s work within it, we risk losing one way of knowing God, narrowing our vision and understanding.

What are the big issues today?



The Foresight report 'Global Food and Farming Futures' (2011)¹ set out a number of global issues and challenges. The report forecasts that the global food system will experience a growing number of pressures over the next 40 years. These include the following.

- Global population size will increase from seven billion today to eight billion by 2030, and probably to over nine billion by 2050.
- Many of these people are likely to be wealthier, creating demand for a more varied, high-quality diet requiring additional resources to produce.
- Competition for land, water and energy will intensify.
- Reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and adaptation to a changing climate will become imperative.

The report set five challenges:

1. Balancing future demand and supply to ensure that food supplies are affordable.
2. Ensuring that there is adequate stability in food supplies and protecting the most vulnerable from the volatility that does occur.
3. Ensuring food security for all, which the report recognises is not the same thing as simply growing more food.
4. Managing the contribution of the food system to the mitigation of climate change.
5. Maintaining biodiversity and ecosystem services while feeding the world.

At the same time it identifies two major failings in the global food economy.

First, hunger remains widespread. According to the report 925 million people experience hunger and perhaps another billion suffer from 'hidden hunger', in which important micronutrients (such as vitamins and minerals) are missing from their diet. In contrast, a billion people are substantially over-consuming, spawning a new public health epidemic of obesity involving chronic conditions such as *type-2* diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Second, many systems of food production are unsustainable. Without change, the global food system will continue to degrade the environment and compromise the world's capacity to produce food in the future, as well as contributing to climate change and the destruction of biodiversity, soil quality and freshwater resources.

¹ Foresight: The Future of Food and Farming (2011) Final Project Report, the Government Office for Science, London.

What are the particular issues in Scotland?

In order to gain an appreciation of how these issues impact in Scotland members of the group preparing this report visited two farms which, while not being representative of all aspects of Scottish agriculture, did highlight some important aspects of farming today.

Drumness Farm, Perthshire



Drumness Farm is a large mixed family farm of over 700 acres. The farm produces both livestock and crops with a herd of seventy suckler cows and 400 sheep. Crops grown include barley, wheat, potatoes, swedes and carrots. Among the products of the farm that find their way onto supermarket shelves are up to 5000 tonnes of potatoes a year. This operation is large in scale and carefully quality controlled to meet the exacting standards of compliance required by

supermarket chains. The supermarkets require details of farms use of fertilisers and plant protection products; pollution prevention; wildlife and landscape conservation; energy use and recycling; and health and safety.

At the same time the supermarkets keep a firm lid on prices to ensure that shelf prices are held down. Potatoes produced on the farm are stored in four large storage sheds on site each holding up to 2000 tonnes of potatoes. These sheds are temperature controlled to ensure the potatoes arrive in supermarket in perfect condition.



While the farm is not organic it is certainly no agricultural desert. Set in beautiful rolling well wooded countryside it is rich with wildlife but there is a large carbon footprint associated with this form of agriculture. Mechanisation and storage of produce to keep it in shelf condition requires a lot of energy and this all contributes to a substantial carbon footprint.

Whitmuir Farm, Scottish Borders



In contrast Whitmuir is a small upland farm of 140 acres in the Scottish Borders. The farm is a mixed operation like Drumness but much smaller in area and numbers of stock. The operation is organic and rather than selling to supermarkets sells directly to the consumer through a box service, a farm shop and restaurant, and a local supporters' scheme.

Supporters pay a monthly subscription for which they can receive a weekly delivery of a food box or can buy at the shop and eat at the restaurant. The cost of produce is higher than in supermarkets, but nevertheless the number of subscribers has grown as has the business. After just ten years in operation Whitmuir is a limited company employing over 20 staff and hosting over 70,000 visitors a year.



Could this style of agriculture play a more important role in Britain? The number of supporters who have signed up to the scheme suggests there are consumers who are prepared to commit a portion of their food budget to a particular supplier. Mostly these are people who have transport and the opportunity to choose their food supplier. As matters stand this is very much a niche market and the challenge may be for this style of agriculture to break through into the wider market. Congregations may wish to investigate this kind of link with farms, to strengthen their connection to local food production and the land.

However the great majority of food purchases in Britain will continue to be from supermarkets which have the advantages of price, product range and convenience. This gives them an enormous influence over British agriculture.

The Role of the Supermarkets

It is mainly in this context that supermarket chains have grown to play such an important role in our lives in Scotland. As such they are powerful intermediaries between farmers and the public. The four largest supermarket chains in Scotland by sales (Tesco, Asda, Morrisons and Co-operative) now account for over 70% of Scottish food sales.

There are positive and negative implications of this consolidation into a relatively small number of large supermarket chains. On the positive side, the scale of operation of supermarkets means that they can quickly deliver a wide range of foods

to stores across Scotland at a relatively low cost. They have increased the range of foods available to consumers and can bring fresh food from around the country and around the world. They can maintain high standards of hygiene and quality control and they can be held to account by media pressure and public campaigns.

On the negative side in driving down prices the supermarkets have encouraged a culture of food as a cheap commodity. Their global operations have increased 'food miles' and associated carbon footprints by importing fresh food from around the world. The small number of large supermarket companies also exercise considerable power over their suppliers in Scotland and elsewhere, both in contract conditions and in price, putting considerable pressure on farmers and other food suppliers. Nowhere has this been more hotly debated than in the supply of milk.

Dairy farmers in Scotland have complained for years that they do not receive a fair price for their milk and that many of them are being driven out of business. Supermarkets on the other hand claim that they pay above market prices for milk, sometimes through a dedicated supply network of farmers.

The Office of Fair Trading fined supermarkets for price fixing of dairy products between 2002 and 2003 and the UK government is planning to establish an adjudicator to monitor and enforce a Groceries Supply Code of Practice. This may help to resolve this and other disputes between farmers and supermarkets but at present it is clear that food retailing is an imbalanced market with a few very large supermarket businesses on the one hand and a large number of relatively small farming businesses on the other. The question remains whether this structure could ever be fair or sustainable.

What can congregations do? A spiritual response

Many congregations are already responding to this challenge both spiritually and through practical food projects. This includes participation in creation time worship, in study groups, by growing food on church land; or running food co-operatives or community cafes. This work reflects the growing concern and awareness of food as a spiritual and practical gift.

There is a variety of resources available on line. These include *Just Food: an Environment Resource Pack* from A Rocha; *Our Daily Bread: food in God's Creation*, the resources developed for Creation time 2011 by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, which included contributions from the Church of Scotland.

OUR
DAILY BREAD
FOOD IN GOD'S CREATION



One particularly interesting resource for congregations is *Just Eating? Practicing our faith at the table* from the Presbyterian Church USA, that has been the subject of a short course of meetings at St. John's Kirk in Perth and which provides a programme of study and action. The General Assembly is asked to commend this work and to encourage all congregations to get involved in their

own churches and communities, to celebrate food as a gift from God and to share the gift with others.

The practical responses:

1. Can you grow your own food?

Gardening and growing on allotments are age-old systems of growing food which are still enjoyed and thriving in Scotland. Gardening remains one of the best, most local and most satisfying means of growing food. It can be an exercise that sustains health and the spirit. Its continuing popularity can be seen in the waiting lists for allotments and a shortage of land for allotments common in many council areas.

Community gardening is based on a collective growing on community owned or rented ground. A number of successful community gardens and farms now exist in cities and country. Many have developed with school and community cross-links and most are based on growing food with a variety of polytunnels, greenhouses, recycling facilities, wormeries, play areas etc. Many of these gardens help school students to learn about food and the environment.

While some people never lost the gardening habit, many more people have little knowledge of or confidence in growing food. Church projects can help people learn to grow food plants and reconnect to nature. This not only reduces food miles and bills, but also offers fresh food in season and promotes new skills, companionship, and a healthier lifestyle.

The Fairlie Sustainable Community Garden Project, North Ayrshire

“The Fairlie Growers took on a derelict old boatyard site in the village to develop a community garden where villagers can learn to grow-their-own herbs, fruit and vegetables organically using intensive, raised bed, horticulture methods. Our mini allotment, raised bed garden design makes vegetable growing possible for anyone, whatever their ability and fitness. The garden also acts as an outdoor social hub where villagers of all ages meet, mix and have great fun. We demonstrate a sustainable lifestyle, we feel more healthy, chat with friends and enjoy looking after this little bit of God’s glorious creation. The Growers also gain all the therapeutic benefits associated with the activity of gardening. It brings together people of all ages from the community.”

Extract from Fairlie Parish Church website:

www.fairlieparish.co.uk/11GARDENERS/11gardeners.htm

2. Supporting existing growers

Supporting existing growers is an easy way to become more closely involved with food production. Vegetable box schemes are one easy way to do this as are farmers’ markets or community bakeries. The scheme ‘Making Local Food Work’ promoted by the Soil Association and others offers opportunities to get involved. See www.makinglocalfoodwork.co.uk/ for more details. The Fife Diet (see www.fifediet.co.uk/) has attracted a lot of interest and support and the development of local food charters as a means of building a local food economy is gaining ground.

3. Love food, hate waste

Food waste is a problem at every stage of the food chain. According to Zero Waste Scotland, Scottish households throw away 566,000 tonnes of food waste every year, at a cost of nearly £1billion or over £400 per household and with a carbon footprint of over 1 million tons of carbon dioxide.

Wasted food is not only a waste of money and a contributor to climate change; it is an affront to God. The wanton disregard of the gift of food and its casual disposal should be offensive to all Christians. Some sales promotions such as “Buy one get one free!” and concerns about sell by dates and food hygiene can increase food waste. High levels of waste food suggest that we do not care where our food comes from or how it is produced or about the impact of its disposal.

‘Zero Waste Scotland’ is promoting as campaign: *Love Food Hate Waste* that aims to reduce this waste by raising awareness of the environmental and economic impact of food waste. The Zero Waste [website](http://www.wasteawarelovefood.org.uk) offers practical hints, tips and recipe ideas for reducing food waste. All congregations are urged to take account of this advice and try to eliminate food waste at church events as well as at home. You can find out more at www.wasteawarelovefood.org.uk



4 Think about your food choices

Your food choices can make a difference to the way food is grown or processed. The success of Fairtrade owes a lot to the way it has been supported and promoted by congregations and we would ask all church members to think carefully when doing their food shopping. Can you consider where the food you are buying was grown, how it was processed, and if it is from outwith Scotland how far it has travelled and if it is Fairtrade? We recognise that there are real constraints on choices for some people due to the cost or availability of good fresh food and ask the Scottish Government to help resolve these issues so that the choice of good food is available to all.

5 Think about where you eat out

Over the last 40 years, the habit of eating out has taken an increasing share of the total expenditure by consumers on food and beverages and is now over 20% of all food expenditure worth about £4billion a year in Scotland. Members of congregations could consider the same questions when eating out as when shopping. Can the restaurant or café tell you where the food you are buying was grown, how it was processed, and if it is from outwith Scotland, how far it has travelled and if it is Fairtrade?

6 Supporting Healthy Food in schools, hospitals and prisons

The food served to children in schools, patients in hospital or to prisoners has frequently attracted attention. This is a huge business in which the quality or origins of the food had often been secondary to price. It need not be so and the pioneering

work carried out in East Ayrshire schools to use locally sourced food in school meals shows what can be done. Congregations should consider supporting campaigns to promote better eating in schools, hospitals and elsewhere such as those publicised and supported by television chefs. There are other similar campaigns in which congregations could play a part in ensuring that vulnerable people are given the best quality food and care.

Conclusion and Deliverances

We ask the General Assembly to reflect upon the importance of food and agriculture and to consider the question ‘what can congregations do?’

The role of supermarkets and their power has been a repeated theme in discussions; their power over Scottish farmers, whose livelihood can be determined by supermarkets’ policies or decisions; over agriculture, people and the environment elsewhere in the world; and over consumers in Scotland who are now so dependent on a very small number of suppliers for their daily food. As has become apparent in banking it can be very unwise to rely heavily on a small number of big businesses. We should therefore question why we rely on so few big supermarket businesses for our food, for both practical and spiritual reasons.

There are alternatives, which we encourage all congregations to explore. We call upon congregations not to take their food for granted but to respond to the challenges set out in the deliverances below.

The report calls upon the General Assembly to:

- instruct the Church and Society Council to provide resources to assist members of the Church to reflect on the theme of food as a gift from God, to think about where their food comes from and how it is produced, and to study and act on the issues raised in the report.
- commend congregations that are involved in community food projects, encourage all kirk sessions, urban or rural, to consider how they can help promote local food projects, and remind all congregations and church members about the spiritual benefits of sharing food.
- note with concern distorting influences on the food chain linked to the predominance of a small number of powerful supermarkets, and raise this concern with Scottish and UK Governments.
- instruct the Church and Society Council to engage with the Scottish Government about how the government and its agencies can help farmers, retailers and communities in Scotland to work together to provide healthy and affordable food for all.