

Green Party

Food Policy



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1. Summary & Key Points

Safe, fresh, nutritious food is a basic right for all and is essential for the wider health and wellbeing of our society. Quality food production drives the national economy and is an important source of employment, especially in rural areas. We must ensure that our food production and distribution systems safeguard our reputation for quality food, our environment and our rural communities.

The increasing industrialisation and globalisation of agriculture has come with great ‘external costs’ to the environment, including soil erosion, depletion of water resources, pollution, loss of biodiversity, increase in greenhouse gas emissions and animal suffering, and the United Nations estimates that 28% of the world’s agricultural land is used to produce food that is wasted ([FAO, 2013](#)). We are also experiencing an epidemic of obesity at home with over three hundred thousand children living in Ireland being obese or overweight ([Children Rights Alliance, 2010](#)). Similarly the percentage of the population suffering ‘food poverty’, which has been shown to be a contributing factor to obesity, is increasing ([Oireachtas Committee ‘Food Poverty Report’, 2012](#)).

We need to make substantial changes to our food production and delivery processes, in consultation with all stakeholders, including farmers, growers and consumer groups, in order to ensure that every citizen has access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food.

- The prospect of the commercialisation of the Irish state food safety organisations is concerning and believes this should be monitored closely.
- We support the development of publicly owned municipal food markets in all major cities and towns.
- We must encourage community involvement in food growing, through allotments, community and school gardens.

- We need to encourage and protect small scale production in order to preserve Ireland's international food reputation
- The food distribution system should be fair and accessible to all food producers and we support alternative routes to market for small mixed farms
- Levels of pesticide and drug (including antibiotics) residues in food need to be reduced or eliminated where possible.
- We support organic food production in Ireland as the best way to reduce Ireland's dependence on chemicals and fossil fuel energy in the food production cycle.
- Regulations and guidelines on claims about health, sustainability and ethics need to be developed and legally defined and protected.
- The Green Party supports schemes at local and national levels across primary and secondary schools aimed at educating children about all aspects of food
- The Green Party thus supports a moratorium on production and import of genetically modified (GM) foods.
- Legislation should be introduced so that vending machines in schools can only supply healthy snacks.
- The Green Party supports initiatives to reduce food waste such as the legislation recently introduced in France obliging supermarkets to donate unsold food to charity (Assemblée nationale, 2015).

2. Policy

2.1. Introduction

The Green Party believes that access to safe, fresh and nutritious food is a basic right for all people regardless of their social background, age or ability. Access to nutritious and safe food is essential for the wider health and wellbeing of our society. Food production and exports drive the national economy and are an important source of employment, especially in rural areas (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, 2014). Irish Food has a great reputation for high quality on the global market (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, 2014). We need to ensure that our food production and distribution systems safeguard this.

It is also important to recognise that some forms of food production can be socially and environmentally destructive. The Children Rights Alliance reported in 2010 that three hundred thousand children living in Ireland were obese or overweight (Children Rights Alliance, 2010). The Oireachtas Committee 'Food Poverty Report' produced in 2012, indicated that 10% of the Irish population was suffering 'food poverty', which has been shown to be a contributing factor to obesity (Oireachtas Committee 'Food Poverty Report', 2012). Our current pattern of food consumption has not only led to an increase in food poverty and diet-related ill health, it has also caused significant environmental harm. The increasing industrialisation and globalisation of agriculture has come with great 'external costs' to the environment, including soil erosion, depletion of water resources, pollution, loss of biodiversity, increase in greenhouse gas emissions and animal suffering (Soule et al., 1990). Furthermore, the United Nations estimates that 28% of the world's agricultural land is used to produce food that is wasted (FAO, 2013).

The Green Party believes that substantial changes are needed to ensure that food production is sustainable for current and future generations. The Green Party pledges to change food markets and patterns of production and consumption to ensure that every citizen has access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food. The Green Party believes that supporting sustainable local food production will contribute positively to our population's health and wellbeing, and support

sustainable economic growth. We also believe that it is the best way to ensure that Ireland is renowned around the world as a country that protect its environment, produces and values quality food and advocates the use of science for the betterment of mankind. The Green Party pledges to involve all stakeholders, including farmers, growers and consumer groups, in decision making.

2.1.1. Vision Statement

In line with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the Green Party considers access to food as a human right. We believe that safe and nutritious food is crucial for healthy people and a healthy society. The Green Party supports policies and structures that reprioritize how Ireland deals with all aspects of food production to ensure the health and well being of current and future generations in both urban and rural settings.

2.1.2. Principles

This policy is written around eight key principles:

- Addressing issues of food security at individual, local, national and global level
- Reconnecting consumers and producers to support quality food production and supply
- Supporting small indigenous food producers through the development of a fair and accessible distribution system for all farmers, no matter their size
- Promoting practices that protect and improve our environment, including reducing the food sectors dependency on chemicals and fossil fuel energy and promoting local organic farming
- Increasing the level of healthy eating education at all levels of society. This will be achieved with better food labeling, public health campaigns and school curriculum activities

- Reducing food waste at a national and individual level
- Promoting an informed and transparent national debate on the growth of GMO foods
- Promoting the provision and consumption of healthy foods within all state operated institutions

2.2. Food Security

According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) define “Food security exists when all people, at all times, have access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”. The Green Party believes that everyone has the right to a sufficient supply of nutritious and safe food to lead a healthy life and that future food security must be ensured at the individual, local, national and global level.

According to the Economic and Social Research Institute, 1/14th of the Irish population (about two hundred and eighty five thousand people) was affected by food poverty in 2011. Further research conducted by NUI Galway indicates that this doesn't just affect the poor but also affect people from the middle (16%) and higher social classes (15%). Food poverty can be defined as “the inability to obtain healthy affordable food” (British Department of Health, 2005). It results in a poor diet and leads to diet-related illnesses and adverse personal and economic consequences (Mwatsama, Stewart, 2005). There are many factors which can impact on food poverty including; level of income, availability of healthy food, knowledge about what constitutes a healthy diet, and the skills to create healthy meals (Conlon, Friel, 2004).

Being an island, Ireland is geographically and economically vulnerable in terms of its dependency on air and sea transportation. It is also very dependent on food imports (Sheehan, 2012). At national level, the Green Party supports sustainable food production in Ireland as it believes a more ‘food secure’ Ireland will be better placed to resist external unplanned challenges. For instance, climate change and prices rises are likely to affect our ability to import sufficient levels of food in future. As the intensity and range of these pressures increase, the security of supply chains and food safety may come under threat. Population growth - particularly around water, soil

degradation and diseases present significant threat to food production at global level ([FAO, 2011](#)). Ireland is fortunate to have good soil and a good water supply. However, the Green Party believes that this cannot be taken for granted. Water distribution in the east of Ireland is especially under threat from future climate change ([Environmental Protection Agency, 2015](#)). Intensification of storms and sea level rises are also happening as a result of climate change ([Environmental Protection Agency, 2015](#)) and the Green Party support measures to help mitigate against these effects (e.g. mechanisms to maintain and enhance soil quality). As explained in the Green Party's agriculture policy, the Party also supports agricultural methods that do not damage our soil and water quality.

The function of food safety is to inform the public regarding the risks of eating foods and to protect them from consuming foods that have been prepared un hygienically or been contaminated. All food safety decisions should be made on solid and independent science. The Green Party is concerned about the commercialisation of the Irish state food safety organisations and believes this should be monitored closely.

2.3. Reconnecting Consumers & Producers

The [Children Rights Alliance](#) reported in 2010 that three hundred thousand children living in Ireland were obese or overweight. 1/14th of the Irish population currently lives in food poverty, which is a contributing factor to obesity ([Burns, 2004](#)). Those in food poverty are more likely to have a diet of poorer quality food with a higher proportion of processed food ([Conlon, Friel, 2004](#)). The Green Party believes that along with other measures, reconnecting consumers and producers can help tackle food poverty, and support the local economy and vibrant communities ([Cabinet Office, 2002](#)).

The GP pledges to encourage local farmers' market, community supported agriculture and any other direct links between producers and local consumers. In particular, the GP supports the development of publicly owned municipal food markets in all major cities and towns. Municipal markets provide an outlet for local food producers and farmers to sell their produce outside the

corporate food chain. They have the capacity to promote local regeneration and boost local economies. An example of this can be seen in Grand Rapids Downtown Market, USA, where the ‘development has sparked \$50 million in new investment in the neighborhood’ ([Lubenu, 2015](#)). Municipal markets will provide a balance to the dominance of large food retailers and producers and they will boost local economies and build social capital in Irish cities and towns. They also help consumers reconnect with producers by creating an alternative and direct route to market for products, thus allowing producers and farmers to compete on price.

Municipal markets will also contribute to both the local and national economy in terms of tourism. The link between Irish food and tourism is becoming more important and food tourism has been identified as an area where Ireland is able to offer a comparative advantage ([European Commission, 2014](#)). These markets will provide Ireland with a unique opportunity to showcase its local foods to a worldwide audience and increase food tourism to the country. Examples of markets that contribute to the tourism industry in their locality include Belfast’s St. Georges Market ([Millward Brown Ulster, 2012](#)) and London’s Borough Market ([Regeneris Consulting, 2012](#)). We also support assisting the development of food trails to build on our reputation for high quality produce.

Furthermore, the GP pledges to encourage community involvement in food growing, through allotments, community and school gardens. This does not only create a deeper understanding of food, seasonality and environmental issues, it also has positive health and social benefits ([Hope & Ellis, 2009](#)). As such, the GP supports requiring local authorities to proactively provide allotments in urban areas at affordable rents and to promote their benefits.

2.4. Supporting Smaller Food Producers

Agrifood is Ireland’s biggest indigenous industry and under the Food Harvest 2020 initiative, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine aims for a 33% increase in the primary output in agriculture, fisheries and forestry ([Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, 2014](#)). The

Green Party believes that any increases in targets should be based on sustainable economic, employment and environmental policies.

In particular, while there might be significant economic opportunity in large scale industrial farming, the GP believes that small and medium sized farms are an essential part of the rural structure of Ireland and need to be supported. As well as producing high quality products and contributing to rural economies, they play a significant role in protecting our biodiversity and landscapes (Convention on Biological Diversity, 2008). Considering that the majority of specialty food producing businesses are based in a rural region (National Food Centre, 2001), the GP believes that encouraging and protecting small scale production would allow Ireland to preserve its international food reputation¹ (National Food Centre, 2001), while developing sustainable rural economies. The Green Party advocates for clear standards and criteria for different quality meat, cheese and dairy products that allow farmers with grass-fed dairy and beef to differentiate themselves from industrially produced milk and beef. Schemes such as the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and Traditional Specialty Guaranteed (TSG) that support and protect names of quality agriculture products and foodstuffs should be further promoted. Although consumers' willingness to pay more for these products varies across countries, within a specific country consumers always have a greater willingness to pay for Geographical Indication (GI) labeled than non-GI labeled products (Menapace et al, 2009).

There is also a significant imbalance in Ireland regarding the distribution and retailing of food (Berry, 2015). Ireland's food economy is now controlled by a small number of large food processors and retailers and this often means that the success of small producers is solely reliant on them getting a listing with large retailers (National Food Centre, 2001). The Green Party believes in choice for producers, suppliers and customers and the food distribution system should be fair and accessible to all food producers and farmers regardless of size and the Green Party supports alternative routes to market for small mixed farms.

¹ The main market for specialty food producers is the export

2.5. Protecting and Improving our Environment

Levels of pesticide and drug (including antibiotics) residues in food need to be closely monitored and programmes are required to reduce them, and where possible eliminate them, should be introduced.

As detailed in our agriculture and animal welfare policies, the Green Party calls for a review of Ireland's reliance on industrial meat production in beef, pork and poultry, the use of imported feed and antibiotics and the health and welfare of animals in these processes.

Ireland has a unique position and reputation in global markets (PWC, 2016), which could be threatened by the use of imported feed and the increasing industrialisation of our production processes, resulting in serious economic impacts for the country. The Green Party recognises the role of quality assurance in maintaining the trust and reputation of Irish produce and long term economic growth. Following the Horse Meat Scandal of 2013, consumer behaviour towards local butchers might indicate a loss of trust in major retailers (Central Statistics Office, 2013). Quality assurance policies should seek to promote trust in high quality local meat production and supply.

Likewise, the Green Party believes that large scale offshore fish farms have the potential to be detrimental to the marine environment and to affect our global reputation as a country producing quality fish. For instance, the broadcast of a documentary on industrial salmon farming in Norway in prime time French TV in November 2013, led to substantial decrease in sales in that country (De la Chesnais, 2014). For all these reasons, the Green Party only supports a sustainable fish farming industry that supports coastal fishing communities.

The Green Party pledges to systematically reduce Ireland's dependence on chemicals and fossil fuel energy input in the food production cycle. The Green Party believes that the best way to do this is to support organic food production in Ireland. Only 1.3% of land was farmed organically in 2011 and organic farming currently accounts for 3-5% of total agricultural output (Teagasc, 2014), a percentage that signifies an under-performing sector that could be transformed into a significant economic output for the state. The party believes in reducing supply chains and localising food

production where possible, and does not believe that prioritising imported organic produce from all over the world over locally produced products. The Green Party thus proposes an increase in organic output to 20% of total output by 2021 (see agriculture policy for further details) and the introduction of compulsory labelling of ‘country of origin’ on food products. A survey conducted in 2014 by Love Irish Food showed that a 95% of consumers in Ireland would like to see ‘Country of Origin’ labelling on all grocery food and drink products.

Finally, the Green Party believes that supporting local, sustainable food production will have positive impacts on tourism all over the country. The ‘Accommodation and food service activities’ accounted for 7.2% of direct employment nationally in 2013 (Failte Ireland, 2014) and food tourism as a market in Ireland is valued at €2.2bn per annum (Bord Bia, 2009). Food tourism is a growing market segment internationally and is largely value-based. Visitors to Ireland, who partake in a food tourism experience, spend a lot, and more importantly spend, in rural areas, where food is often the primary driver of the local economy (Grant Thornton Business Insight Survey, 2013).

The Green Party supports promoting sustainable Irish food production as a mechanism to maintain viable regional economies. The Green Party believes in promoting this sector locally, regionally and internationally – and support small businesses and local initiatives in promoting their brands as part of a wider national tourist offering.

2.6. Healthy Eating Education

Food affects all members of our society and we have a duty to ensure that all members of society have access to quality nutritious food.

2.6.1. Labelling

The Green Party believes that food labelling is crucial to the achievement of a healthy society, as it allows consumers to make informed choices (FSAI, 2009). Regulations and guidelines on claims about health, sustainability and ethics (such as ‘heart healthy’, ‘locally produced’ and

‘fairly traded’) need to be developed to ensure that customers are not misled. The meaning of such terms needs to be legally defined and protected so that consumers can exercise their choice to support sustainable food. This would also allow companies with high standards to compete fairly against others applying ‘greenwash’ to products and practices.

In particular, producers and distributors should be required to label food clearly with the country /countries of origin (including the main ingredients for processed food). In line with our animal welfare policy, producers should be required to include on labels; the origin and production method for all meat, eggs and dairy products used in making a product, and the source of all seafood.

As a large proportion of palm oil expansion occurs at the expense of biodiversity and ecosystems in other countries ([WWF, 2015](#)), thereby having negative environmental and social impacts, we support the specific listing of palm oil as an ingredient where used.

2.6.2. Food Education

The Green Party supports the introduction of schemes at local and national levels across primary and secondary schools aimed at educating children about all aspects of food, from growing it, selecting - including seasonality, understanding labels and nutritional information, meal planning, purchasing, preparing and growing your own. In particular, all schools should be required to provide an area for children to learn how to grow and cook food, and education about food and nutrition should be reinforced. FAO research has shown that education in food and nutrition can help children and their families improve nutritional wellbeing, develop good lifelong eating habits and increase their environmental awareness ([FAO, 2016](#)).

The Green Party advocates revisiting the relevance of traditional food advice tools, such as the Eat Well Plate Food and Food Pyramid, as contemporary evidence is indicating that these tools’ heavy reliance on carbohydrates may be detrimental to public health ([Teicholz, 2014](#)). A National Action Plan ‘Eating Well, Eating Green’ to promote lower levels of meat consumption and increased consumption of fruit and vegetables should be rolled out through the country.

Initiatives such as peer-led cooking clubs should be encouraged at local-level, allowing knowledge sharing and contributing to vibrant communities (see Moynihan et al, 2006). These schemes should focus on preserving and enhancing the expertise, knowledge and tradition of food production and preparation in Ireland.

Legislation should be introduced so that vending machines in schools can only supply healthy snacks. Studies in the US have shown that States with strong laws governing competitive food nutrition content across grade levels, including vending machine food choices, appear to reduce adolescent BMI increases and the likelihood of adolescents remaining overweight (Taber et al, 2012).

The Green Party pledges to introduce a comprehensive school meals programme. By caring for the nation's children and providing healthy, nutritionally balanced school meals, the State would make an important investment in future health of our nation. The effective provision of school dinners has long term consequences, not just in terms of the social and economic benefits and the health of the individual, but in fostering the ethos of a caring and just society, where the State acts for the common good. Please see our School Dinner policy for further details.

2.7. Reducing Food Waste

Food waste is increasingly becoming a focal point in sustainability arguments. Roughly one third of the food produced for human consumption gets lost or wasted globally. In other words, 28% of the world's agricultural land is used to produce food that is wasted at an economical cost of about \$750 billions, equivalent to the GDP of Switzerland (FAO, 2013). This has significant environmental implications as well as costing an average Irish household several hundred Euros a year. Food waste occurs all along the food distribution chain. Some of it is unavoidable but the majority of it is not.

The Green Party supports initiatives to encourage reductions of waste by all producers throughout supply chains. In particular, the Green Party supports monitoring the introduction of food waste legislation in France (Assemblée nationale, 2015), whereby supermarkets will have to give unsold

food products to charities, and see if a similar policy could be implemented in Ireland. We also support private initiatives such as “les gueules cassées”, whereby “odd” shaped fruits and vegetables are sold 30% cheaper than standard products. Furthermore, by promoting the consumption of local produce as much as possible, we can reduce supply chains and therefore reduce opportunities for wastage.

The Green Party supports strict targets for the reduction of all food packaging, increased recycling rates and phasing out of particular non-recyclable and non-compostable packaging. The Green Party supports innovative low-impact approaches to food packaging, such as bulk-buy food stores that allow customers to use their own packaging, deposit schemes (e.g. bottle deposit scheme as implemented in Germany Zero Waste Europe²). We are also in favour of greater investment in research in alternative packaging such as biodegradable plastics. At restaurant levels, the Green Party supports encouraging restaurants, cafes and takeaways to work with their suppliers to reduce packaging and ensure that it is compostable or recyclable. As the majority of food waste in Ireland occurs at the retail and consumer level, the Green Party will ensure that funding is available for public education campaigns to reduce food waste, including information and education about purchasing decisions, recipes and food safety. By creating public awareness of seasonality and cooking skills, we will not only reduce food waste but also save money and create more sustainable local jobs.

According to the FAO, home composting can potentially divert up to 150kg of food waste per household per year from local collection authorities (FAO, 2013). Therefore, where possible, the increased use of composting (including from domestic waste) should be promoted. Local authorities willing to introduce subsidized home composting kits (see London Borough of Southwark Council) or hens³ should be supported. While our soil’s quality and long-term

² Studies have shown that refillable bottles have 50-60% lower global warming potential than one-way beverage containers (Institute for Energy and Environmental Research).

³ Several French towns e.g. Communauté de communes du Pays de la Serre are giving hens to households interested in adopting them: An hen can eat 150kg of food waste per year while producing eggs

sustainability are now in danger of degradation and loss of fertility due to human activity, this could also contribute to maintaining soil quality in food production.

2.8. GMO Foods

The Green Party bases its policies on independent academic research. As the science of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) currently stands, the consequences of these technologies are not fully understood (FAO, 2011), therefore the Green Party is against the current use of GMOs in agricultural production.

In particular, the Green Party has significant concerns surrounding the intellectual property of food and the patenting of seeds in GMO production. The private contract between a grower and a GMOs company significantly limits the grower's rights to the purchased seed. These contracts generally contain 'no saved seed' provisions which prohibit growers from saving and/or reusing seeds from GM crops (Hamilton). The Green Party thus believes that these technologies have the potential to threaten public access to safe and nutritious food. Furthermore, the widespread use of GMOs in production (both human food and other forms of production e.g. biofuel or animal feed) has the potential to promote monocultures, and therefore reduce biodiversity. Overreliance on monocultures could threaten food security, particularly if a crop fails.

2.9. State Operated Institutions

The state currently provides food to large sections of the population including those in education, health, penitentiary and bureaucratic institutions. It is therefore in a unique position to drive the food industry towards better practices and promote healthy and sustainable food. The Green Party supports high standards for food served in the public sector and advocates for local food procurement policies to be allowable under European Union and World Trade Organisation rules.

Whilst it may be perceived as potentially increasing the cost of food, at a time of high pressure on public funds, the Green Party believes that it is an investment and in the long term help to sustain

local production and will reduce the need for subsidies. It will also contribute to better health and wellbeing of the population, thus leading to indirect savings in health costs.

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