



11 Case study

Case Study 7

Queen’s University Belfast Nexus Project

Keywords

Farming, business resilience, toolkit

Location: NI

Collaborating Organisations: Institute for Global Food Security, Friends of the Earth NI, and Belfast Food Network

Date: 2016–2017

Project funder: 7th Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC) /Nexus Network

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Aim: Address potential impacts of climate change and future energy availability on food security in NI.

Introduction

To explore perceptions of NI food sustainability in the context of domestic and global impacts of climate change. Interviews and scenario planning workshops were held with a wide range of key stakeholders within the food and farming sector. Key concerns expressed by participants, included:

- Risks and uncertainties associated with Brexit
- Lack of political leadership
- Increasing frequency of extreme weather events
- Rising levels of food poverty



Key Proposed Actions

- Post-Brexit farm subsidies focused on environmental protection
- A shift to non-intensive farming methods and local supply chains, in order to increase resilience to global food or energy shocks exacerbated by climate change
- Diversification of the farm sector to increase climate resilience
- Adoption of a rights-based approach to food
- An integrated, inclusive approach to food policy-making and governance
- Rights-based approach to food – enshrining right to food in legislation; guiding principle for food policy and planning.
- Independent NI Environment Agency – distinct support and enforcement roles.
- Government-led diversification of agricultural production – across sector and within farm enterprises – resilience to climate change, market volatility and economic shocks.

Conclusions

Engagement with stakeholders indicated that, across all sectors, there is a shift in thinking towards greater strategic emphasis on quality of produce, environmental standards, resilient farming, and away from production growth and economies of scale.

Outcomes

Key proposed actions suggested for policy innovation and resilience-building initiatives, were drafted into a strategic transition plan. Proposals for policy change included:

- Integrated food system planning at regional and council levels, joining-up food policy areas: agrifood strategy and land management, climate change mitigation/adaptation, energy security, household food security, waste/resource management.

Proposals for strategic/collaborative initiatives included:

- Regional distributed energy supply based on larger-scale CHP plants, providing district heating, and fueled with indigenous biomass crops, agricultural and arboricultural wastes, food waste.
- Network of food hubs/community-supported agriculture (CSA) schemes around Belfast and urban centers.
- Reinvigorated, collaborative research capacity– linking research and farmer support functions of AFBI, College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) and universities.
- Soil health research and advocacy network, with emphasis on biological health and carbon sequestration.

The project report and transition plan was presented at a final public conference, circulated to participants and other stakeholders, and presented to a few interested groups, including Climate NI.