Gathering the Highland Voice for a Good Food Nation

Final report on the survey results

Highland Good Food Partnership (HGFP), October 2026

Survey open 28 May to 6 October 2026. 208 responses, of which 182 are from the Highland Council area.

Introduction

The Highland Good Food Partnership is an independent charity and membership organisation that brings people together to work towards a better food system in the Highlands.

All councils and health boards in Scotland have until April 2028 to create a Good Food Nation plan in line with the National Good Food Nation Plan, looking carefully at how their work affects people's food, and deciding on actions to improve it. We are working with both organisations to support and advise on this. But a plan for the Highlands should be informed by the Highlands, so we asked the people who live here what they would like us to focus on in our conversations with the Council and NHS Highlands.

Our survey, *Gathering the Highland Voice* opened in May 2026 and closed in early October 2026. It had two parts. The first was short: where people live, whether they are a member of the Highland Good Food Partnership, and a ranking of the six national Good Food Nation outcomes. The second, for anyone with five more minutes, asked people to provide more information on their opinions and priorities around what the Council and NHS Highland could change and what their local area food system looked like.

We received 208 responses. This main report covers the **182 from postcodes inside the Highland Council area**. A further 26 people from outside the area also took part. We were glad to hear from them, and what they said is set out separately in Appendix A.

How to read the numbers

A word of caution. This was an open survey, so the people who answered chose to do so. It is not a representative sample of everyone in the Highlands:

- Nearly a third of Highland respondents (30%) are members of HGFP.
- Inverness and its surroundings are well represented.
- We did not ask about age, income or household type.

That being said, 87% of respondants chose to complete the second, more in depth part of the survey. The results tell us a great deal about the thoughts and priorities of Highlanders who are engaged in thinking about their food system.

Written comments are quoted in people's own words, lightly corrected for spelling, and are identified by broad area. A few comments were too specific to quote without identifying someone, so those have been paraphrased. More on how the data was handled is in Appendix B.

Overview of the results

One hundred and eighty-two people living in the Highland Council area responded, from Caithness to Lochaber, Skye to Strathspey, with the largest group (about a third) from Inverness and its surroundings.

Top ranking of the six national Good Food Nation Outcomes was clear: respondents put **everyone being able to eat well (Outcome 1)** first (it was the top choice of just over half), with **a food system that is good for nature, climate and animals (Outcome 2)** a clear second. Health (Outcome 3), food culture (Outcome 5), a successful food industry (Outcome 4) and global responsibility (Outcome 6) followed in that order.

Among the 155 people who went on to choose five areas of change for the Highland GFN plans, two stood out: **supporting local farmers, food hubs and short supply chains** (77% chose it) and **changing public sector catering contracts** so that schools, hospitals and council kitchens serve healthier, local, sustainable food (68%).

In their own words, people painted a picture of a place with real strengths and real frustrations. They praised the producers on their doorstep, the box schemes, farm shops, fish vans, monthly markets, community larders, allotments, orchards and food hubs, and the energy of the people who run them. They also described how hard it is to reach all of this: local food is often seen as a luxury, supermarkets (and in many villages a single shop) dominate, distances are long, there is no butcher, greengrocer or abattoir within reach for many, land for growing is hard to get, and school and hospital food is a source of widespread disappointment.

Looking five years ahead, the hopes were remarkably consistent: **people want more food grown and sold close to home, at prices that are fair to both producers and households**; more allotments, community gardens, polytunnels and orchards; healthy, local meals in schools and hospitals; children who know how food grows and how to cook it; and the infrastructure that makes local supply workable, such as small or mobile abattoirs, processing space, food hubs and reliable distribution. Many also hoped for less ultra-processed and fast food, less waste, and a culture in which good food is simply normal and shared.

Asked what the HGFP should do within this work, people told us they want to see us:

- **act as a convener** between communities, producers, the Council and NHS Highland, securing funding to do so long term.
- to push for long-term funding and for rules that suit small producers
- to help get land into the hands of growers
- to support education and cooking skills
- above all, to **help deliver tangible results** rather than a paper exercise.

A number of people also told us we are not yet widely known, and that we need to change that. There were honest differences too, for example over plant-based diets and venison, and over how food banks fit into the picture, which are set out in the analysis.

The results, question by question

Each question below starts with a short summary and is followed by more detail, including the themes that came up again and again. Percentages are of Highland respondents who answered that question.

Q1: Where people live

What is the first part of your postcode?

In brief

This report covers the 182 respondents that live in the Highland Council area: A third are from Inverness, Beauly and Loch Ness, but the various areas of the Highlands have representation, if not at an equal density.

Where Highland respondents live
182 respondents, grouped by postcode district

Inverness, Beauly & Loch Ness (IV1–5, IV63)	61
North of Inverness: Black Isle, Easter Ross, Dingwall (IV6–20)	28
Badenoch & Strathspey (PH20–26)	26
Lochaber (PH33–34)	23
Wester Ross & Sutherland (IV21–27)	19
Skye & Lochalsh (IV40–56)	12
Caithness & east Sutherland (KW)	10
Nairn (IV12)	3

The Inverness IV2 district alone accounts for 35 responses. Sixteen of the 23 Lochaber responses were gathered together at our AGM event, and covered only question 1. We note where they make a difference in Q3 and Appendix B.

The spread matters. Remote and island-facing areas such as Skye and Lochalsh, Wester Ross and Caithness have fewer responses in absolute terms, but their comments about distance, cost and the loss of local shops and butchers were some of the most vivid in the survey. Where it helps, we point out where a view was particularly strong in rural and remote areas.

Q2: Membership of the Partnership

Are you a member of the Highland Good Food Partnership?

In brief

Almost a third (30%) of Highland respondents are members, nearly two thirds (63%) are not, and 8% do not know. So **most of the voices here come from beyond our existing membership**.

Membership
182 respondents

No	114 (63%)
Yes	54 (30%)
Don't know	14 (8%)

This is encouraging. A survey that only reached members would mostly tell us what we already hear. The fact that around 130 people outside our membership took part (with 14 were not sure) shows the survey travelled beyond our usual circles.

Members and non-members answered in very similar ways overall, which gives some confidence that the main findings are shared widely. There were a few modest differences, which we note under Q3 and Q5. One respondent who was not a member told us they had not heard of us before, and another that we had "not reached" people like them. These are useful reminders that awareness of HGFP work is something to work on (see Q11).

Q3: The six Good Food Nation outcomes

The GFN outcomes as set out in the National Good Food Nation plan are as follows (for improved accessibility, the 'easy read' version of these outcomes were used in the survey):

Outcome 1: Everyone in Scotland eats well. They can easily get safe, healthy, affordable, environmentally friendly food that suits their age.

Outcome 2: Scotland's food system is good for the natural environment, the climate, wildlife, and animal health and welfare.

Outcome 3: Scotland's food system helps everyone to have good physical and mental health.

Outcome 4: Our food and drink industry is successful and looks to the future. It is an important part of the economy. It supports and creates good jobs.

Outcome 5: Scotland has a good food culture. Scottish people and communities are interested in and educated about good and sustainable food.

Outcome 6: Decisions we make in Scotland are good for food systems here and around the world. We share and learn from what other countries are doing.

Q3: Thinking about your own priorities for food in your life, please rank the six outcomes from 1 (most important) to 6 (least important).

> **In brief**
>
> People put **everyone eating well** clearly first and **a food system that is good for nature, climate and animals** second. Health came third, with food culture, a successful food industry and global responsibility behind. Among 176 Highland respondents, 52% ranked "everyone eats well" first and 77% placed it in their top two.

Share of respondents ranking each outcome in their top two
176 Highland respondents who ranked the outcomes. Average rank in brackets (1 is most important).

Everyone eats well: safe, healthy, affordable, environmentally friendly food (2.0)	77%
Good for the natural environment, climate, wildlife, animal health and welfare (2.5)	61%
Helps everyone have good physical and mental health (3.3)	25%
A good food culture: people and communities interested in and educated about good food (3.9)	18%

A successful food and drink industry that supports good jobs (4.3)	13%
Decisions are good for food systems here and around the world (5.0)	6%

In more detail

Two outcomes stand well ahead of the rest. "Everyone in Scotland eats well" was ranked first by 91 of 176 people (52%) and had the best average rank of 2.0. The environmental outcome was ranked first by 40 people (23%) and in the top two by 61%. Taken together, the message is that **people see access to good food for everyone, and care for the land and sea that produce it, as the heart of this work**.

Health was ranked first by 17 people (10%), food culture by 14 (8%), the food industry by 11 (6%) and global responsibility by 3 (2%). It is worth saying that "lower" ranked does not mean "unimportant". Several people told us they found it very hard to rank six things they saw as linked, and a few declined to rank at all. One wrote that all the aspects are "fundamentally interconnected" and need tackling together. Another said it was difficult because it "feels like there are so many priorities". The ranking is best read as a statement of emphasis, not of what to drop.

> **Sensitivity check.** The 16 responses submitted together from our Lochaber AGM event ranked *physical and mental health* first far more often than anyone else (9 of 16). Without them (160 responses), the picture is the same at the top: everyone eats well (average rank 2.0) then environment (2.4), but health slips to 3.5 and food culture to 3.9. In other words, the order of the top two does not depend on that group, while the position of health does a little.

Members and non-members agreed closely: both put eating well first and environment second. The one visible difference was that members placed environment a little higher (average 2.3) than non-members (2.6), and global responsibility lower.

Q4: Five more minutes?

Do you have 5 more minutes to answer some more questions?

> **In brief**
>
> 87% (158 of 182) carried on to the longer part of the survey. That is a high rate of staying power and a sign of how much people had to say.

The 24 responses that stopped after the ranking question include the 16 Lochaber AGM responses described above, so only 8 other respondents chose not to continue. Of those who continued, 155 went on to choose their five areas of change (Q5), and between 130 and 133 wrote in answer to each of the three main open questions (Q7, Q8 and Q9). Many of those answers were detailed and thoughtful, and a few ran to several paragraphs. A couple of respondents noted that the survey took longer than five minutes, which is a fair point we will remember when designing future consultations.

Q5: Five areas of change for the Highland Council and NHS Highland plans

Please choose 5 options from the list below, to tell us what area of change you'd love to see highlighted in the GFN plans. These options were specifically about the levers available to Highland Council and NHS Highland.

In brief

Two areas were chosen far more than any others: **supporting local farmers, food hubs and short supply chains** (77%) and **changing contracts so schools, hospitals and council catering serve healthier, local, sustainable food** (68%).

A middle group around half of people chose were about helping

- small food businesses
- community growing
- protecting land
- food education in schools.

Food forums and surveys were chosen least (6%)

Areas of change results
155 Highland respondents each chose five. Percentage of respondents choosing each option.

Support local farmers, food hubs and short supply chains	77%
Change contracts so schools, hospitals and council catering serve healthier, local, sustainable food	68%
Help independent shops, markets and small producers with funding, training and affordable spaces	51%
Empower community growing: streamline land access, waive fees, build into planning policy	50%
Protect land for food growing and influence where food businesses can open	46%
Strengthen food education in schools	45%
Bring council, NHS, businesses and community groups together regularly on food	37%
Improve access to healthy food in rural areas	37%
Support food banks, food clubs, social supermarkets and affordable food schemes	35%
Use planning and licensing to reduce fast-food clustering near schools	25%
Run campaigns and programmes to cut waste in homes, schools, shops and catering	17%
Create food forums, surveys and workshops so residents help shape food policy	6%

In more detail

Local supply and public procurement lead. The two top choices fit together. People want a Highland food economy in which local producers can reach local customers, and they see the public sector, through the meals it buys for schools, hospitals and care settings, as the single biggest lever for making that happen. The same link was made in the written comments, where procurement was described as "by far the biggest lever" and "vital to include". Several people also wanted the Council and NHS to lobby government on agricultural support so that it rewards sustainable food production.

Backing the people who do the work. Around half of respondents chose help for independent shops, markets and small producers, and empowering community growing by making land easier to access. Together with "protect land for food growing" (46%), these choices point to a strong appetite for practical support on the ground: space, fees, training and fewer hurdles.

Education and access. Food education in schools was chosen by 45%. Rural access to healthy food (37%), food banks, clubs and social supermarkets (35%) and cross-sector partnership (37%) formed a third group. Reducing fast-food clustering near schools was chosen by a quarter (25%), and waste reduction campaigns by 17%.

Who chose what. The differences between members (45 people) and non-members (97 people) in this question were modest and based on small numbers, so should be treated as hints only. Members were somewhat more likely to choose help for independent producers (58% against 45%) and food education (51% against 40%). Non-members were more likely to choose rural access (39% against 31%), food banks and affordable food schemes (37% against 29%) and, notably, waste reduction (26% against 4%). Waste, then, is an issue that clearly matters to some people outside our membership and is worth a closer look.

People found this question hard. Several said all the options were good and that choosing five was difficult, and a few felt the choices were too narrow. This is why the next question matters so much.

Q6: Other levers

Tell us more! Thought of other levers we've not mentioned here, or have more to say?

> **In brief**
>
> 55 people used this box. Their ideas included:

- dealing with the lack of abattoirs
- levelling the playing field for small producers and for supermarkets
- teaching cooking and nutrition from an early age (the most common theme, about a dozen people)
- regulating or reducing ultra-processed food
- promoting plant-based and organic food
- making land and planning rules work for growers
- rolling out food waste collections.

In more detail

Education and skills. About a dozen people said food education is the lever that would pay back most. They talked about cooking and nutrition from the first years of school, practical cooking classes for adults and parents, school gardens, and school canteens with enough

seating for everyone to sit down together. One person said that "too many folk have become adults without basic cooking skills", which shows in sales of convenience food and takeaways. Another described a children's garden project that they felt had proved its worth: "Let us take the wild guess that it is a good idea and just get on with it, please."

Infrastructure and a fairer market. Three people, from Skye and elsewhere, named abattoirs as the missing link; one said it "has to be the number 1 priority" because without it, the rest of the list is "pointless". Others asked this work to level the playing field for crofts, farms, market gardens and seed producers, who face higher input costs and lower support than larger operations, and to ease rules that were written for industrial producers. Several asked for less power for supermarkets, including limiting their ability to undercut small businesses and to get planning permission easily.

Public health and the food environment. A group of people asked for firmer action on ultra-processed food, from clearer public messaging and training for GPs, to removing it from council premises, to national regulation. One suggested using the experience of tobacco control as a model. Others wanted more focus on organic food and fewer pesticides, and on how food is labelled and where it comes from.

Plant-based food. Around six people asked for much stronger promotion of plant-based diets, citing climate, biodiversity and health. We note that this view sits alongside others who want more venison and local meat in public kitchens, and we return to this in the analysis.

Land, planning and housing. People asked that planning protect farmland and make room for community growing in every new development. One connected this to the shortage of affordable rural housing, which makes it very hard for young people to set up a market garden. Another described the process of getting land for a community group as "overly cumbersome and designed to put people off".

Other suggestions included food waste collections in areas that do not yet have them, partnering with the Co-op as a community-focused business that many rural places depend on, using Social Return on Investment to show the value of better food to health budgets, and linking food access to cash-first approaches and wider food justice. One person asked that food security be treated as the first priority of every public body: "right now Scotland and the UK is not anywhere near secure on food production".

The levers of change available to the Council are limited (even more so for NHS Highland) and it was difficult for some respondants to identify what is available with the sphere of influence. As such, some of the suggestions are not within the Relevant Authorities' powers, but still useful to see what is important to people.

Q7: What is good about food locally

What do you think is good about food in your local area?

> **In brief**
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> 132 people answered. The dominant answer was **the producers and the community effort around them**: direct sales, box schemes, farm shops, fish vans, markets, community larders, allotments and food hubs. About a dozen said there was little or nothing good to say, and even many positive answers came with a "but".

In more detail

Excellent producers, and people who care about them. By far the most common praise was for the producers: small farms, crofts and market gardens selling beef, lamb, pork, eggs, milk, cheese, fruit and vegetables; local bakers; fish vans; and, increasingly, venison. Respondents described buying direct as giving better quality, fewer food miles and a connection to the people who grow. One described what is available near them as "probably one of the best ranges of local food available anywhere in the UK". Several mentioned the venison larders and boxes as a promising way to supply affordable, healthy local protein.

> "We have a food hub run by Lochaber Environmental Group called Food Lochaber. This is great for local small scale producers to get their items out into the community and for consumers to access."
>
> *Respondent, Lochaber*

Community effort. Almost as often, people pointed to what neighbours and volunteers are doing: food hubs, community larders and fridges, social-eating suppers, community shops, orchards with apple press days, seed and tattie days, allotment schemes, and growing groups. A food hub in Easter Ross was praised for shifting surplus food to anyone who wants it, "less based on need and more on getting it used", which widens the group of people who use it and cuts waste. Another respondent noted that "growers are usually keen to help and advise newcomers".

> "The Black Isle Potato Day is mobbed every year and shows the enthusiasm for growing locally."
> *Respondent, Black Isle*

People who grow their own. Many respondents grow some of their own food, swap and share, or get produce from neighbours. Informal exchange was described as widespread, even where formal outlets are few.

Supermarkets and shops. A smaller group, mainly in towns, said that access is straightforward, with plenty of choice, some Scottish and local lines in the Co-op and larger supermarkets, and some independent butchers, bakers and delis. In some villages, the local shop or greengrocer was seen as a lifeline.

The "but". What stands out is how often a positive answer was qualified. Local food is available "if you know where to go and can afford it". Demand "sometimes outstrips supply". "Where we can get local it's great. Very limited." A few said plainly that there is little to celebrate: "I have one local farmer who provides eggs and some fruit and veg in summer. ONE!" Another said they were not sure what was good because there were no food shops in their area at all. This tells us that the Highlands have the ingredients, but that finding, reaching and affording them is the real challenge.

Q8: What is not so good

What do you not like about food in your local area?

> **In brief**
>
> 133 people answered. The leading themes were **cost** (local and healthy food seen as a luxury), **supermarket dominance** and **limited choice** (roughly a third of comments), **distance and access** in rural areas, a lack of local shops, butchers, greengrocers and markets, **too much junk, ultra-processed and fast food**,

disappointing school and hospital meals, and **difficulty getting land for growing**.

In more detail

Cost. More than a quarter of respondents raised the issue of price, and it was the most emotionally charged theme. Local, organic and "good" food was widely described as out of reach for lower-income households, while cheap processed food was readily accessible and affordable. "Sadly it's cheaper to eat fast food and food with very little nutritional value than to eat healthily." Producers see the other side of the same coin: they cannot compete on price with subsidised supermarket systems, and even the small shops that exist have to charge more to survive. One respondent argued that food is in fact too inexpensive, which makes it hard for small producers to make a living. This is the central tension in the survey, and the answer people seem to want is not cheaper farming but fairer systems, support and sometimes subsidy.

> "Locally produced food is largely inaccessible to lower income households; the costs are much higher than regular supermarket options."
>
> *Respondent, Lochaber*

Supermarkets and limited choice. Around a third of comments mentioned supermarkets or the Co-op. Some described the dominance of one chain, in Inverness and in smaller towns, as discouraging a local food economy: it can mean little local stock, plastic-wrapped produce, and fresh food that does not last. In many communities the Co-op or a single small shop is the only option, and people said they have little say over what it stocks. The effects of distance were stark: a 54-mile round trip to a supermarket; a 200-mile round trip to buy "decent food"; the nearest shop 5, 6.5 or 11 miles away. Some people rely on supermarket delivery, which narrows choice further.

Missing links in the chain. People named what is missing: no butcher in several towns, no greengrocer in Inverness or Aviemore, no regular farmers' market in some of the busiest places, and no abattoir for crofters on Skye. Even where producers exist, supply is "fragmented" and takes "extra effort and resources" to find, and many said they did not know where to look. Market times and fish-van visits suit retired people more than people at work. One person asked for something so simple it deserves a mention: a clear guide to where and when to buy local food. The HGFP map is a good start to this, but there's obviously room to grow in terms of hyper-local networks.

Junk food and the food environment. About 20 respondents were concerned about ultra-processed food, takeaways, fast-food outlets and sugary snacks. Several mentioned fast-food and bakery chains in town centres, convenience shops that sell mostly snacks, and a lack of healthy takeaway options. One person was worried about new planning permissions for three fast-food businesses in their area. Others pointed out that restaurants and cafes cater mainly for passing tourists, with "standard pub grub" and little local sourcing, and that there are few plant-based options.

School and hospital food. About ten people criticised school meals and a few hospital food, in strong terms in some cases: "terrible", "shocking", "the worst". Reasons included menus set centrally and lacking variety or freshness, little local or seasonal produce, council procurement processes that make local supply difficult, and the sense that staff on the ground are not given the freedom to cook with real food. One parent told us their child still takes a packed lunch because, despite some progress, school meals lack variety and healthy options.

Growing, land and waste. People described long waiting lists for allotments, allotments given to friends, tiny gardens on new builds, prime farmland lost to housing, and a community growing space that took almost a decade to establish. A short growing season was acknowledged as a challenge. About eight people mentioned a lack of organic produce and some mentioned pesticide use. In Badenoch and Strathspey, people raised the lack of food waste collection and local composting, and many people spoke about plastic packaging and food miles.

Awareness. A few said that the value of local food is not recognised. One said that the abundant local food is not "promoted" enough and that people "would not notice or make a fuss if it were taken away".

Q9: Five years from now

In 5 years time, what changes would you most like to see in your area around food?

> **In brief**
>
> 132 people answered. The picture they painted: **more food grown and sold locally**; **more community growing** with easy access to land; **fair prices and affordable good food**; **healthy local meals and learning about food in schools and hospitals**; **the infrastructure to make it work** (abattoirs, processing, hubs, markets and shops); and a culture where good food is shared and celebrated.

In more detail

Local food, everywhere. The most frequent wish, from around half of respondents in some form, was for more local food and easier access to it: a weekly farmers' market, a local shop that sells local produce, farm shops, direct sales, box schemes and deliveries, and food "grown, processed and sold in the area". People spoke of less reliance on supermarkets and imports, and of local food being "widely available" and "the norm" rather than the exception.

A place that grows. More allotments, community gardens, polytunnels, orchards and market gardens featured strongly. Some visions were modest and practical: a grow bag or a few containers in every household, networks to share gluts (one person described rotting plums that an organised swap could have saved), community poly-tunnels to extend the season. Others were bold:

> “Orchards everywhere with organic veg. Communities working together and with crofters and farmers as a natural lifestyle choice. Every garden growing veg and fruit.”
> *Respondent, Sutherland*

People also asked for land to be found and made available, for productive land to be used for food and not for housing or commercial forestry, and for support for small-scale growers on under three acres in crofting communities.

Affordable, fair and dignified. About a fifth of respondents asked for lower prices, support for low-income families, fair prices for farmers, and subsidies that make local food affordable. One put it as a vision of "a completely different economic environment where somehow everyone could actually afford to pay a fair price for food". Another hoped that eating well would be "accessible for all and not just those that can afford to buy".

Schools, hospitals and learning. Roughly 15 people wanted healthier, local, seasonal meals in schools and hospitals, school gardens, and children who "sow seeds, eat food in

their canteen they grow in garden". Cooking from scratch, preserving and understanding seasonal food were seen as skills to bring back for all ages. One person hoped for doctors to be able to refer patients to dietary change programmes.

The infrastructure of a local food system. Several people, again especially from Skye and the north, asked for small or mobile abattoirs, processing space, food hubs, a community supermarket for growers, collaborative distribution, and a "reinforced and resilient distribution network for local produce". Others asked for restaurants and cafes supported to use local ingredients, "central food halls where small traders can sell", and incubator spaces for new food businesses.

Healthier food, less waste, kinder to nature. People hoped for less ultra-processed food and fewer fast-food outlets, more plant-based options, a working food waste collection and composting scheme, less packaging, more organic and pesticide-free growing, and farmland managed for food and biodiversity together. One described wanting to feel a sense "that farm land was being managed for food and biodiversity".

Community, culture and pride. The most uplifting answers were about belonging: community meals and supper clubs, food co-ops, meals on wheels for older people, local seed banks, "pride in local produce", and a community that celebrates its food knowledge and traditions and supports the people who feed children and families. One person spoke of "an apricot straight off the tree" and of people appreciating good food so much that they could "see beyond the average" that the supermarket offers.

Q10: Anything else?

Tell us more!

> **In brief**
>
> 35 people added more. Themes were the need for people and capacity on the ground (volunteers, workers), a challenge to treating food banks as a long-term answer to poverty, cooking skills and seasonal eating, support for gluts and sharing, and ideas for land, markets and incubator spaces.

In more detail

Capacity is the bottleneck. A member of a community growing group told us that attracting volunteers is a real challenge, and asked not for training in volunteer recruitment but for paid facilitation, as the task is "too big" for a small number of volunteers. Another respondent said that finding people to work is still a big issue, and that it is "not necessarily about training but the non-availability of a workforce". These were short comments with a large message: good ideas need people with time and pay to carry them out.

A challenge on food banks. One thoughtful respondent argued that hunger "is not a food problem, it's an income problem", and that a Good Food plan must aim to end the need for food banks, not treat them or surplus-food redistribution as a lasting solution. This area of priority was echoed elsewhere in the survey, where 35% of people chose supporting food banks, clubs and social supermarkets as one of their five priorities. The work food banks do is important: support is needed for the people doing this work now, but also necessary is a clear commitment to incomes and dignity so that fewer people need it. A related comment asked for cash-first approaches in the Q6 responses.

Skills, seasons and sharing. Respondents asked for help with cooking from scratch and budgeting, seasonal eating, preserving gluts, and what to do with herbs and leftovers. One

said that there is "a lost generation" of cooks. Another said that they would like to grow more in their garden but that the cost of materials and the knowledge needed are barriers they suspect many others share.

Other ideas included incubator sites for small-scale food production and processing (Dingwall was suggested), making Scottish-caught seafood more affordable locally, a tax or ban on sugary drinks and ultra-processed food (with the caveat that healthy food must first be affordable), and a social media page listing local suppliers and when they are available. One person felt strongly that "local" should not become a distraction from quality: access to good food matters most, and good distribution for small producers is essential, even if it's not hyper-local. A range of supply chains is preferable.

Q11: Our work

If you have feedback or ideas about what you'd like to see us as an organisation doing in this work, please tell us here.

> **In brief**
>
> 52 people responded, and the feedback was warm, practical and candid. People want us to **convene and connect**, to **secure long-term funding and a formal partnership** with the Council and NHS, to **help small producers and community groups** with practical support, and to **deliver tangible action**. Several said we need to be better known. About seven simply said thank you and keep going.

In more detail

Convene, connect, facilitate. The role people most often described was bringing people together: helping the Council and NHS connect with growers, processors and communities; identifying the barriers to new food production; and bringing local people together to find solutions. One person called us a convener and facilitator. Another asked for a service level agreement with the public sector.

> "Drive a formal food partnership with Highland Council and NHS Highland and wider stakeholders. Secure core funding from these organisations to ensure that the work you do can continue without the danger of grant funding."
>
> *Respondent, Inverness area*

Funding, recognition and lobbying. Several people hoped HGFP would be recognised and properly funded. Others asked us to lobby local and national government to change laws and rules to suit small, local businesses (dairy, slaughter, meat, preserves, baking and more) while keeping food safe, and to push for tax on sugar and ultra-processed food.

Practical help for producers and communities. Respondents wanted community kitchens and shared processing rooms (to deal with the "I don't have the space at home" and "I don't understand the red tape" barriers that defeat setting up small food businesses), help with marketing local producers and with markets, support for producer co-operatives, support for communities seeking to buy land and estates for community food production, and help for people applying for projects and funding. One suggested that community growing space be required in every new development.

Education and awareness. About ten asked us to support cooking and nutrition education: hands-on cooking for all, programmes designed by and for young people, workshops for affordable meals for families on low incomes, and conversations about where our food

comes from. One suggested a citizens' assembly on fixing Scotland's food system, and joining national campaigns for a "good food majority".

Action over paper. A clear thread ran through the feedback: people want results. "Make changes tangible at a grass roots level. Don't waste time, energy and taxpayer's money on paper exercises." "More action and results, less talk and bureaucracy." One respondent urged us to focus on food, farming and produce rather than climate and social justice; others, in contrast, explicitly wanted food justice and access at the heart of our work. We take all of this as a reminder to keep our work grounded and practical while staying true to our values.

Awareness. Two people said HGFP are not as visible as we should be. One respondent said we are "pretty much an unknown entity" among most farmers and processors and need more PR and a clear purpose and strategy. Another said we had not reached people like them but looked great and they would follow us. A website with news, events and a blog was suggested, which we already do, but obviously have room for more widespread promotion of the fact.

Other points. One respondent asked us to acknowledge the evidence linking red meat and cancer before promoting venison as a sustainable protein. Another noted that "hyper-scale" data centres are taking up prime agricultural land. A third reminded us that the Good Food Nation is a fair-trade issue too, so our remit might include local and world produce.

Q12: Staying in touch

Would you like to be included in future consultations?

> **In brief**
>
> 78 Highland respondents (43%) said yes. That is a ready-made community of people willing to keep shaping this work, including about 37 people who are not yet members. These contacts will feed into the consultation work we'll be supporting around the Draft Highland GFN plans.

Future consultations
182 Highland respondents

Yes	78 (43%)
No thanks	72 (40%)
Did not answer	32 (18%)

Members were much more likely to say yes (33 of the 45 who answered, or 73%) than non-members (37 of 93, or 40%). Even so, 37 non-members asked to be included, and eight of the twelve people who did not know if they were members did too. These contact details are safely held by HGFP in line with GDPR regulations.

Overall analysis: what the Highland voice is telling us

Read together, the answers to all twelve questions tell one story: not of people who are complaining; **it is a story of people who know what a good food system looks like, can see pieces of it around them, and want the public bodies that shape daily life to help join it up**.

What matters most

Everyone being able to eat well. This was the top priority in the ranking and it runs through every written answer. People are not asking for an abstract food ideal. They want fresh, tasty, healthy food to be affordable and within reach of everyone: the parent on a low income, the older person without a car, the crofter 20 miles from a shop, the child whose school lunch is the main meal of the day.

Good for the land, sea and climate. People in the Highlands live close to the places where food comes from, and they do not want food to cost the earth. Their second priority was care for nature, climate and animals, and it showed up as support for crofting and small-scale farming, organic and wildlife-friendly growing, less packaging and waste, and farmland that works for both food and biodiversity.

Short and resilient supply chains. The most popular area of change by some distance was supporting local farmers, food hubs and short supply chains. Behind this is a concern about resilience: dependence on one or two supermarket chains, long journeys by road and ferry, and a food system that people feel is fragile and extremely vulnerable to shocks and interruptions. Several said directly that food security should be a top priority.

The public sector as a lever. The second most popular area of change was using public procurement to put healthier, local and more sustainable food into schools, hospitals and council catering. This is the clearest ask of Highland Council and NHS Highland in the survey, and it was raised unprompted again and again in the written answers.

What gets in the way

- **Cost and fairness.** Good food is seen as a premium product, while cheap, processed food is easy to find. Producers say they cannot compete on price, and households say they cannot afford the alternative.
- **Supermarket dominance and distance.** In many communities the choice is one shop, or a very long journey. Home delivery helps, but narrows choice and cuts people off from local producers.
- **Missing infrastructure.** No abattoir on Skye, no butcher in several towns, no greengrocer in Inverness or Aviemore, no regular market in some of the busiest places, and fragmented distribution. Without these links in the chain, supply cannot meet demand.
- **Land, planning and housing.** Allotment waiting lists, unclear land ownership, cumbersome processes, farmland lost to housing, and an affordable-housing shortage that stops young growers from settling in the places that need them.
- **People, time and funding.** Volunteer-run projects, workforce shortages and short-term funding mean that good ideas are fragile. Respondents asked for core funding, paid facilitators and less red tape.
- **Skills, habits and the food environment.** Lost cooking skills, a food culture dominated by convenience and takeaways, fast food near schools, ultra-processed food on every shelf, and school meals that disappoint.
- **Rules built for big producers.** Small-scale producers and processors face costs and paperwork designed for industrial operations.
- **Awareness.** People do not always know where local food is, or that supportive networks such as the Highland Good Food Partnership exist.

The ideas and the energy already here

What makes this report hopeful is that almost every barrier came with an idea attached, and many of those ideas are already being tried. Respondents told us about:

- food hubs that connect small producers to customers, and community larders and fridges that make good use of surplus;
- a croft micro-processor and co-op that has moved over two tonnes of local crofters' meat in a year, and plans a rentable community kitchen to remove the "red tape" barrier for new food businesses;
- venison larders and boxes bringing affordable local protein and public benefit together;
- monthly markets, honesty boxes, egg machines, fish vans and veg box schemes;
- community orchards, apple press days, seed and tattie days, allotment schemes, school gardens and swap networks for gluts;
- and new ideas: mobile abattoirs, incubator sites, community-supported agriculture, a "gardener corps" to help people start growing, shared community kitchens, a citizens' assembly, social supermarkets and community meals.

Where views differ

The Highland voice is not one voice, and that is a strength. There are honest differences, and a good plan will hold them with care:

- **Plant-based and meat.** Some respondents want a strong shift to plant-based food for health and climate, with criticism of deer and livestock; others want more venison, beef, lamb and local meat in schools and shops, and are wary of plant-based substitutes. Both groups want less ultra-processed food and more locally produced food.
- **Food banks and income.** Many value food banks, clubs and social supermarkets and want them supported; one strong voice argued that food insecurity is an income problem and that a plan must aim to end the need for emergency food.
- **Cheap versus fair.** Households want food that costs less; producers want a fair price. Respondents suggested subsidy, supply-chain support and cooperative buying as ways to bridge the gap.
- **Local versus accessible.** One respondent cautioned that "local" should not become a distraction from good distribution of quality food and improved access; most others saw the two as going hand in hand.
- **Focus.** Some want our work to stay close to food, farming and produce; others want food justice and climate firmly in the picture.

What this suggests for the Good Food Nation plans

Points arising from the survey for Highland Council and NHS Highland

- Use procurement to put healthier, local, seasonal food in schools, hospitals and care settings, and give catering staff freedom to cook with real food.
- Support development of the missing infrastructure of a local food system: small or mobile abattoirs, processing and shared kitchen space, food hubs and distribution, and markets.

- Make land easier to find and use for community growing: clear land records, simple processes, allotments in every community, and growing space built into new developments.
- Embed food growing, cooking and nutrition education in the curriculum of every school, and offer practical cooking support to adults and families.
- Tackle cost and access, especially in remote areas, with attention to incomes and dignity, rural delivery and community shops.
- Use planning and licensing to protect farmland and to limit fast food where children gather.
- Extend food waste collection and composting to places that do not yet have them.
- Sustain the community organisations doing this work with core, multi-year funding, and make a food partnership between public bodies, producers and communities permanent.

A Highland voice for good food

People across the Highlands are already building the food system they want. They are asking us to help them join it up.

Behind every statistic here is someone who took the time to tell us about the food where they live. They told us about the producers people know by name, the community larder run by volunteers, the school garden that teaches a whole class how a seed becomes dinner, the croft kitchen that has moved tonnes of local meat to local plates. They also told us about the long drive to the shop, the town with no greengrocer and the school lunch that is not what it could be. And in almost every answer they told us what they hope for.

What they hope for is not complicated: Orchards in every village and a few tomato plants on every windowsill. Local food that people can afford and producers can live on. Children who know where their dinner comes from and how to cook it. Hospitals and schools that serve food that heals and nourishes. A fish van, a butcher, a market, a shop that stocks what grows nearby. Neighbours sharing a glut of plums. A supper table with room for everyone.

None of this will be done by one organisation, one council or one health board. It will be done by all of us: communities, crofters and growers, shopkeepers and cooks, teachers and nurses, and the public bodies that can open doors, shift budgets and write the rules. That is what a Good Food Nation plan can be: a way of making the work of the many easier, and a promise that the good food that people are already making will be backed for the long term.

The Highlands have the land, the sea, the skills and, as this survey shows, the will. A food partnership exists to bring those together, and 182 people have just shown how many hands there are. If you read this and see yourself in it, you are already part of the movement. Come and join us at Highland Good Food Partnership.

Appendix A: Respondents from outside the Highland Council area

Twenty-six people whose postcodes are outside the Highland Council area also took part. We wanted to hear them, and what they said is gathered here separately so that the main report speaks for the Highlands. With so few responses, we give counts instead of percentages in most places and have not tried to draw firm conclusions.

Who they are

Area	Postcodes	Responses
Moray, including the Speyside edge	IV30, IV32, IV36, AB37	10
Western Isles	HS2, HS6	6
Argyll & Bute	PA34, PA35, PA37, G84	5
Orkney	KW15, KW16	3
West Dunbartonshire	G82	1
Falkirk	EH51	1

Six of the 26 are members of the Partnership, 19 are not and one does not know. All 26 carried on to the longer questions, and 14 asked to be included in future consultations.

The six outcomes (Q3)

Of the 23 who ranked the outcomes, 11 put "everyone eats well" first, 5 environment, 3 health, 2 food culture and 2 the food industry. None put global responsibility first. The averages were close to the Highland picture: eating well (2.5) and environment (2.5) at the top, then food culture (3.4), health and industry (both 3.9) and global responsibility (4.8). Food culture was a little more prominent here than in the Highlands.

Five areas of change (Q5)

Areas of change chosen
26 respondents from outside the Highlands, each choosing five. Number of people choosing each option.

Support local farmers, food hubs and short supply chains	21
Change public catering contracts	18
Help independent shops, markets and small producers	15
Bring council, NHS, business and community together	11
Empower community growing	11
Protect land for food growing	10
Strengthen food education in schools	10
Run waste reduction campaigns	9

Reduce fast-food clustering near schools	8
Support food banks, clubs, social supermarkets	8
Improve rural access to healthy food	8
Create food forums, surveys and workshops	1

The top two are the same as in the Highlands: local supply (21 of 26) and public procurement (18). Support for independent producers comes third, as it does among Highland respondents. Waste reduction campaigns were chosen more often than in the Highlands (9 of 26), which fits with comments about composting and packaging below.

Other levers (Q6) and further comments (Q10 and Q11)

Ten people added levers. Common ideas were a bottom-up, community-based approach to growing; NHS, school and social care procurement built around local food; using existing farming grants to encourage a wider range of local plants and breeds; education about pesticides, additives and food miles; giving crofters a "quantifiable demand" so they will produce more for local markets; reserving land for local growing within agroforestry support; and removing barriers to community composting in rural places. One said that "policy is the only thing that ensures changes are enacted and stick". In Q10 people suggested taster sessions and cooking competitions in schools, a trust-run regenerative farm on the edge of Stornoway, support for new growers, and supper clubs and pot-luck suppers that bring people together over food. In Q11 people asked us to educate younger people, make sure we are woven into existing cultural networks such as churches and Gaelic-speaking groups, support food organisations to cover the whole region, make supermarkets stock a share of local produce, and give more ways for local people to get involved.

What is good (Q7)

Twenty-one people answered. Again, the main praise was for local producers and independent shops: butchers, farm shops, bakeries, box schemes, fish vans, market gardens and community growing projects. Island respondents mentioned Stornoway black pudding, local fish and shellfish and good choice for people with coeliac disease; people in Moray spoke of organic and biodynamic growers, local box schemes and community growing projects; others praised a village bakery and fish vans that bring fresh fish more than once a week.

What is not (Q8)

Twenty-four answered. The themes will be familiar: too much ultra-processed and packaged food, and too many fast-food outlets (a handful of respondents, including some concerned about clusters in town); the cost of local food against subsidised supermarket food; thinly spread access points; little local fruit, vegetables and organic produce; and school meals described as unhealthy. Some themes were sharper for places beyond the Highlands mainland:

- **Islands and supply.** Western Isles respondents said that much of what the supermarkets sell is mass-produced and highly processed and comes a long way, with ferry disruption a regular problem. They also said that too much locally

produced food, especially meat, is exported and not eaten at home. One described the only shop in a South Uist community selling almost nothing organic, and said that small shops "redefined against footfall" can leave communities without choice.

- **Small shops becoming snack outlets.** A Speyside respondent noted that their nearest shop, now part of a convenience franchise, mostly sells snack-type products.
- **Land under pressure.** Two respondents in the west of Scotland were worried about house building on greenbelt or farmland, and one asked for more allotment space.
- **Venison.** As in the Highlands, a respondent in Argyll said venison is under-used locally.

Five years ahead (Q9)

Twenty-three answered. Hopes were close to Highland ones: more locally grown and produced food, available easily and at reasonable prices (including local meat, fruit and vegetables, organic where possible); local food hubs and food co-ops; schools, hospitals and council food outlets serving local produce; growing in the curriculum and cooking taught in school; allotments and community growing in every neighbourhood; fruit trees in public spaces; food waste and composting facilities for everyone; more farm shops in areas with few; and a fairer system where people on low incomes can reach good food. One respondent described wanting "an emergency level approach" to rebuilding local, regenerative food systems because of worries about climate and global instability.

What Appendix A adds

> The people outside the Highland Council area mostly confirm what Highland respondents said, which suggests the findings travel. The extra things they add are the island perspective (ferries, imports and exports, the loss of choice in small shops), the pressure on land near growing towns, and a repeated call for community composting and food waste solutions.

Appendix B: Notes on the data and method

The data

The survey was run online between 28 May and 6 October 2026 and produced 208 submissions. **Claude AI was used to analyse data** from the final data export, which did not include names or email addresses. The AI report was then fully read and edited by Eleanor Forster, who also read through each individual survey response.

The group of 16 responses on 6 October

The sixteen responses that were submitted from Lochaber were gathered from discussions at our Lochaber AGM event. We kept them in the Highland results because they are valid responses from Highland postcodes, but show how they affect the Q3 ranking. They do not affect Q5 to Q11, which they did not answer, though they skew slightly the percentage of people that engaged further with the later part of the survey

How Claude AI analysed the answers

- Percentages are of respondents who answered the question concerned. Rankings were converted into an average rank (1 is most important) and counts of first and top-two places.
- For the five-area selection (Q5), we counted how many people chose each option.

- Written answers were read in full and grouped by theme. Counts of written comments (for example "about a dozen") are approximate, because comments often touch on several themes, and are based on reading, not automatic coding.
- Quotations were lightly corrected for spelling and punctuation. Personal contact details were not included in the data given to Claude AI for analysis.

Limitations

This was a self-selected survey. It is not designed to be representative, we did not collect age, income, household or ethnicity data, and some areas are represented by only a handful of responses. Differences between groups (such as members and non-members) are small-number comparisons and should be read as indications. The strongest findings are those that appear consistently across the ranking, the selection and the written answers.

Highland Good Food Partnership, *Gathering the Highland Voice for a Good Food Nation*, final report on the survey results, October 2026. For more information contact the HGFP at hello@highlandgoodfood.scot.