

INSTITUTE OF HOSPITALITY

WHITE PAPER

BEYOND TARTAN AND SHORTBREAD: LEADING SCOTTISH
HOSPITALITY THROUGH LEGACY, LOCALISM AND LARDER

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HOTELS



by Katherine Price MIH

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It's making sure that managers in hospitality are training their teams, making sure that we're getting high-quality team members that can actually sell the product and scream about Scottish hospitality.

Raegan Lynch AIH, restaurant general manager, Cradle, Cromlix Hotel, Dunblane

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The background

Scotland's produce is famous worldwide, from Scotch whisky to Scottish salmon, the UK's biggest food export [1]. Scotland's food and drink sector is estimated to be worth £19 billion [2], making it Scotland's third largest industry by value, adding £7 billion in Gross Value Add (GVA) to the economy as well as employing 123,000 people.

According to Scotland.com [3]:

- **43 bottles of Scotch whisky are shipped overseas every second.**
- **More Scotch whisky is sold in one month in France than cognac in a year.**
- **More than two-thirds of the world's langoustines are sourced in Scotland.**

And figures indicate Scottish produce is highly valued at home as well as abroad, with more than 70% of people saying they would prefer to buy Scottish produce and would pay more to do so [4]. But despite this success, the sector isn't without its challenges and opportunities for further improvement, for example, ensuring local produce is consistently appearing on local plates.

With the hope of improving fairness within the UK supply chain, the Food Products (Market Regulation and Public Procurement) Bill is being discussed in the House of Commons, while industry bodies continue to campaign for fairer conditions to support food and drink suppliers and hospitality operators in the current economic climate, including in Scotland.

The challenge

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We've got to acknowledge the cost of doing business, before you've bought your first piece of produce, is at a historic high, so people are having to make economies just to keep the doors open, and unfortunately, that is affecting food quality... the danger is, people are getting used to making these economies.

Robert Richardson FIH MI, CEO, Institute of Hospitality

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Scotland's food and drink sector is facing challenges on multiple fronts. Brexit and Covid-19 both impacted Scotland's supply chains, with the introduction of export barriers having a particularly negative impact on sectors with a limited domestic market, and at the same time, there are imbalances in terms of production and domestic consumption; for example, fish consumption in Scotland is only half of what is recommended by dietary guidelines [5].

These challenges are compounded by increasing costs, the Net Zero transition, international competition and labour shortages, as well as a skills gap across the labour force. More small, independent suppliers are joining larger conglomerates, while closures of abattoirs in rural areas mean animals are having to travel further to be slaughtered [6], adding layers of cost and bureaucracy.

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The problem that I've now got is trying to get the right staff who can then cook the right product the right way to match the expectations within the Edinburgh market.

John Forrester MIH, general manager, Braid Hills Hotel, Edinburgh

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Beyond tartan and shortbread: leading Scottish hospitality through legacy, localism and larder

Scottish produce has a legacy of quality both domestically and abroad, with a wealth of products that can claim international recognition and demand. The key and the challenge are in maintaining the quality of the products that are already widely known to ensure that reputation and demand are sustained and resilient, while also exploring new opportunities for other products in Scotland's larder. While Scotland's agritourism sector and farmers' markets are examples of great things being done with quality produce at a local level, challenges remain around scale and access more widely, with operators at the mercy of their geography.

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It comes back to the grassroots of how people eat and the food on the plates, and education at the school level. There's a lot of work that needs to be done there in terms of engagement... It's certainly not easy; it's not straightforward. But we have to keep trying to do what we think is the right thing.”

Kevin Keenan MIH, founder and director, Effective Hospitality Management

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On the domestic side, localism is an important consideration, which includes supporting local businesses. Guests like to know they're supporting local people when giving their custom to a hospitality outlet, for example, that the business sources local produce, employs local people and engages with its community, like helping to educate local people, including schoolchildren, about food and provenance. Sharing the stories with guests, of what has gone into producing the ingredients on the dish they've ordered, is one way to help re-establish that respect and connection between people and nature.

Promoting locally produced oily fish species, for example, has even been recommended to improve public health and seafood system resilience [7], a goal towards which industry and government could work together. Although collective action may be more challenging for a sector like hospitality, businesses can come together to communicate clear, united messages to government about what the sector already contributes to the economy and communities, as well as the opportunities, and work together to achieve collective goals, as well as tackle issues such as staffing shortages and skills gaps, issues which won't be solved by individuals acting in siloes.

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If you have a united voice, and you keep saying the same stories, create the stories, keep telling those stories, take those stories to government as a united voice... that united voice is the bit that is frequently missing.”

Fiona Campbell MBE, CEO, Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers

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The need to support local suppliers and solve the hospitality skills gap is somewhat interdependent. Quality produce requires skilled chefs who know how to handle such products properly and trained front-of-house staff to sell it. Currently, people are being promoted through the ranks sometimes before they are properly equipped with the management skills, for example, in procurement or sourcing, that traditionally experienced head chefs would have had. As a result, businesses are having to resort to buying in cheaper and prepared products to save on labour costs to simply stay afloat, a problem not only confined to Scotland.

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It's working with the hotels, restaurants, apprenticeships... it's getting everyone to work together to that single goal: to improve what we do.

Willie McCurrach OBE FIH, food and hospitality consultant

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Best practice

In the face of rising costs, Stonefield Castle in Tarbert is revisiting its food offering, factoring in guest feedback, and has launched a small plates menu, still serving quality produce but in smaller portions and at an affordable price point. As a result, it has drawn in more local guests.

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We can have the quality produce but lower portion sizes and get it out to our customers. It's also encouraged more local people to come in because it's seen as more affordable. There are ways you can address things.

Anne MacDonald MIH, general manager, Stonefield Castle, Tarbert

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Pursuing such a strategy may also have other unintended positive consequences, for example, reducing food waste and helping operators reduce their environmental impact. This may also help businesses address public health concerns, with around two-thirds of Scottish adults overweight and one-third living with obesity, disproportionately high figures compared to the rest of the UK [8], as well as cater to the rising use of GLP-1 agonists such as Ozempic for weight loss [9].

Solutions

Promote Scottish produce and the story behind it

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There's areas of people who will be expecting more for their buck. If they're paying £100 for a steak, they want to know everything about it, what farm it came from, what its name was.

Denise Quinn-MacArthur FIH, founder, Q Procure

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Suppliers are best placed to raise the profile and tell the stories of the people that are working to produce Scotland's food, from farmers to fishermen. Sharing these narratives, for example on social media, and with their hospitality customers, can help to provide a clear message that all stakeholders can share, with government representatives and the international market, as well as locally with staff and customers.

“

We still need to bang that drum about how important the fishermen are, how important the local farmers are, the jobs that they support, and getting people to actually take a leap of faith and support local produce. Because people will pay more for proper local produce.

Stephen Montgomery, director and spokesperson, Scottish Hospitality Group

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Invest in team training

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It's making sure that managers in hospitality are training their teams, making sure that we're getting high-quality team members that can actually sell the product and scream about Scottish hospitality.

Raegan Lynch AIH, restaurant general manager, Cradle, Cromlix Hotel, Dunblane

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Staff require proper training to ensure they have the tools to do the tasks and roles required of them. This also includes providing them with the information they need to sell local produce. In some instances, restaurants take their teams to meet suppliers in-person, see where the products are coming from and hear the stories first-hand. The better front and back of house team members know the supplier, understand and respect the produce, and can communicate that story of where a product has come from and who grew it, the better experience teams can provide guests.

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If you've got someone on the floor who knows where the fish is coming from, and actually knows the captain, then it's easy to sell stuff, isn't it?

Gordon Cartwright MIH MCGB, hospitality diagnostician

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Consider what's on offer

Regularly evaluate what a business is offering, taking into consideration guest feedback. Hospitality venues don't need to follow every trend as it emerges, but it's worth assessing where the market is and how a business could be providing a quality product that meets the needs of today's consumer, and can even align with public health goals, for example. It's also worth thinking differently about how Scottish hospitality and produce could be promoted. Robert Clark, general manager at The Leddie, East Lothian, suggests, "Instead of exporting it, bring people to this country to buy it."

Next steps

- 1) Help to promote the stories behind Scotland's produce. Raise the profile of local farmers and fishermen, and share those stories internationally and locally.
- 2) Invest in team training, for example, taking staff to meet suppliers and see the farms where the produce they're serving is coming from.
- 3) Evaluate food and beverage offerings based on the needs of consumers, and the feedback they're giving.

Methodology

This white paper has been produced following a round table discussion at Dakota Hotel Glasgow on 23 April 2026.



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Resources

Scottish Agritourism

Scotland Food & Drink

Scottish Hospitality Group

Scottish Seafood Association

References

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