

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

Date: January 27,2021

Report Number: IC2021-0002

Report Name: Iceland Launches its First Comprehensive Food Policy

Country: Iceland

Post: The Hague

Report Category: Agricultural Situation, Agriculture in the News, National Plan

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Report Highlights:

In December 2020, the Government of Iceland presented its first comprehensive Food Policy. The policy aims to ensure food security, sustainability, and efficiency, and extends to the year 2030. It lays out actionable items to improve national food security, consumer protection, marketing rules, etc. The strategy focuses on five specific areas: value creation, consumers, image and (food) security, the environment and climate, and public health.

Introduction

Iceland expects global food demand will increase and change in the coming years as the human population increases, consumption patterns change, and the earth's resources become more limited. As health and well-being depend on secure access to food, Iceland believes it is responsible for ensuring food security for all of its inhabitants. The Government notes that international trade has given nations the opportunity to enter new markets and increase productivity, leading to increased prosperity. The country also notes that it matters how food is produced, distributed, purchased, and consumed, emphasizing food must be safe and utilized (both in production and consumption) as efficiently as possible. To that end, Iceland argues that sustainability is the foundation of good living standards for the future.

In December 2020, the Icelandic Government launched its first [Food Policy](#), with an outlook to 2030. The Food Policy was presented by Prime Minister Jakobsdóttir and Agriculture and Fisheries Minister Júlíusson. It aims to ensure access to good food, increase the nation's health in harmony with the environment and nature, and lay the foundations for greater value creation in food production. In formulating the food policy, five focus areas have been identified: value creation, consumers, image and (food) security, the environment and public health. The policy also establishes a 31-step [Action Plan](#) aimed at meeting the challenges of the future (an unofficial translation of which is included in this report in Appendix 1).

A Food Policy that Aims to Seize Opportunities and Address Future Challenges

The Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture highlighted the importance of a Food Policy for Iceland as a means to address future challenges for the nation's food system. Prime Minister Jakobsdóttir stressed that “even though Iceland holds unique opportunities in the field of food production, the challenges ahead are also big, not least in the areas of climate issues and public health.” The Prime Minister added that “it is therefore of particular importance to form a clear vision for the future.”

Correspondingly, Iceland's Minister of Agriculture referred to the opportunities that Iceland has in terms of food production. Júlíusson noted:

“{T}he cornerstone of Iceland's new food policy is the country's unique position when it comes to food production. This is undisputed and we should show it off in every respect. While opportunities in Icelandic food production are everywhere, the demand for pure and wholesome products is constantly increasing and we are well placed to meet that demand. Our goal is to ensure continuous prosperity through increased value creation.”

The Food Policy's Five Focus Areas

The Food Policy is centered on five key areas that aim to narrow the focus of activities. The Action Plan supports the implementation of the policy.

Value Creation

The Government sees the competitiveness of Icelandic companies as a prerequisite for continued improvements in the nation's living standard. Sustainability is also necessary for the economy to remain competitive in the long run. A decline in the number of jobs in primary production (due to automation and increased productivity) is anticipated in the coming decades, while the number of jobs in the service

and technology sector is expected to increase. Through research, as well as the utilization of technology and ingenuity, the Government believes increased value can be created from land and sea resources. It is believed that concepts related to Iceland's basic industries, that gain a foothold through innovation, can strengthen communities throughout the country.

Consumers

Iceland notes that consumers are the economic driving force of the economy of all countries, and private consumption accounts for roughly half of the GDP of developed economies. Consumers increasingly influence the operations and productivity of producers and vendors. Competition in the market ensures a more diverse supply, more favorable prices, and strengthens opportunities for consumers. Similarly, consumer behavior is an important indicator for manufacturers and retailers to ensure they can meet demand. The role of consumer law is to protect the position of consumers in the market and to create equality among them. Competition and consumer protection will play a direct and important role in promoting growth and reducing poverty.

Image and (Food) Security

Iceland notes that an increased flow of goods and information, more diverse methods of communication, international trade, politics, and tourism have a major impact on the (food) security and the image of nations and companies. The positive image of the country and the nation is an important tool and it is therefore important to preserve, maintain, and strengthen it in collaboration with stakeholders through research and monitoring. It adds that conditions can also change relatively quickly at the international level so it is important that food security be ensured.

Environment and Climate

Iceland notes that climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time. In order for Iceland to be a leader in the production of wholesome seafood and agricultural products, food production must be environmentally friendly. Emissions need to be reduced while carbon sequestration in food production and distribution will need to be increased, along with increased value creation.

Public Health

Good access to healthy food and beverages is one of the cornerstones of Iceland's public health campaign and an important part of its health promotion efforts. Increased emphasis on health promotion, education, prevention, and strong health services will help ensure that Icelanders remain healthy.

Appendix 1

1. *The official food control system will be reviewed in a comprehensive manner.*

Goal: To increase efficiency and fairness in regulations and supervision, reduce costs and overlapping responsibilities between regulators, improve consumer safety and encourage producer innovation. Food control and the operating licenses of companies operating in the food industry fall under the purview of several parties, e.g. the Food Administration, the Environment Agency, and the municipal health inspectorate. It is necessary to review and harmonize regulations and supervision as well to ensure a clear division of labor. At the same time, it must be ensured that the same party does not take on the responsibility of the implementation of regulations, the investigation of alleged violations, and the determination of a punishment based on its own investigation.

2. *Local community consumption as well as product and service development will be strengthened through regional measures*

Goal: Funding will be secured for regional actions that strengthen local community consumption and product and service development for the purpose of delivering added value to local people.

3. *The operating environment for food entrepreneurs and small food producers will be simplified.*

Goal: The working environment for food entrepreneurs and small producers will be simplified and action will be taken to increase innovation and product development in the food industry.

4. *The incentives for existing agricultural contracts will be reviewed.*

Goal: To ensure that agricultural contracts can better promote value creation, diversified production, and new production methods in agriculture, a review will be undertaken based on the Government's agricultural policy, which is outlined in item no. 7. In preparation for the review, a detailed analysis of the incentives will be carried out.

5. *Equal access to energy will be ensured throughout the country, and the cost of distributing electricity in urban areas and rural areas will be equalized.*

Goal: Electricity and access to electricity is one of the cornerstones of the modern economy. Energy is the driving force of diverse economic activity and equal access at competitive prices can promote equality and freedom of action.

6. *The state's support for food research in collaboration with stakeholders will be assessed.*

Goal: The benefits of the establishment of a Food Fund and a service agreement with [Matís](#) will be assessed to ensure that support contributes to increased value creation in accordance with the emphasis of the Food Policy.

7. *A parliamentary resolution on long-term agricultural policy will be submitted to [Alþingi](#)*

Goal: This will be an opportunity to review the agricultural system from the bottom up and promote further agreement on the future of Icelandic agriculture. A clear long-term agricultural policy is in everyone's interest: farmers, consumers, retailers, producers, and the Government.

8. *Icelandic food production will be compared to its main competitor countries.*

Goal: To analyze the uniqueness of Icelandic food producers. Among other things, drug, pesticide, and hormone use, water, energy and fertilizer use, genetic resources, biodiversity, the proportion of grass feeding for livestock will be considered, as well as other specifics of Icelandic food production.

9. *An interconnected traceability system will be established throughout the food value chain, from resource to consumer.*

Goal: To increase the transparency and access of producers, consumers, and regulators to information. The Ministry will ensure that regulations support the introduction of an interconnected traceability system.

10. *Support will be increased for professionals in food-related industries to promote Icelandic raw materials and knowledge at the international level.*

Goal: To strengthen food culture, domestic product development, and demand for Icelandic ingredients abroad. Needs for continued financial support will also be ensured.

11. *Research on the Icelandic bioeconomy will be mapped and strengthened.*

Goal: With more knowledge of the bioeconomy, ways can be identified to increase synergies and promote sustainable utilization of resources, both within the public and private sectors. Public contributions to basic research in the fisheries sector will be made, strengthened, and increased.

12. *Dashboard on food production and related jobs will be developed.*

Goal: Better data collection and information can be used to assess the development of competitiveness, e.g., product supply, market size, and industry performance.

13. *Better labeling of food.*

Goal: Labeling ensures consumer access to correct information on origin, production methods, and the environmental impact of food. Comparable requirements will apply to domestic and imported production.

14. Set clear rules on how consumer behavior may be influenced.

Goal: To ensure access to consumers in the market, it is necessary to analyze the effects of food marketing on the position and behavior of consumers using behavioral economic methods. It is important to protect consumers from deceptive business practices that affect purchasing behavior but are not covered by the general consumer protection legislation.

15. "Nudging" and other incentives will be used to promote better decision-making for the public. A group will be appointed within the cabinet every two-years for consultations.

Goal: Government action and policy-makers should take into account recognized approaches to promoting better public decision-making and achieving set goals.

16. Independent price controls on food will be strengthened, e.g., in collaboration with Statistics Iceland, the Ministry of Industry and Innovation, and others.

Goal: To increase consumer transparency and confidence in data on food pricing in Iceland.

17. A food security policy will be formulated which will be part of the national security policy.

Goal: To ensure food security in Iceland and that a special food security policy with contingency plans is in place.

18. National security indicators take into account food and food security, including food and water supply, contingency plans, and more.

Goal: Manage inventory and contingency plans on a regular basis.

19. Rules will be set on the use of a country's name when it is used for the promotion of food.

Goal: To ensure harmonization of requirements for manufacturers and others who use a country's name in marketing.

20. Establish an interdisciplinary working group to present a proposal, cost, and funding plan for food and consumer infrastructure.

Goal: To strengthen the food and consumption infrastructure, such as updating the [ÍS GEM database](#) on nutritional content and an amount of undesirable substances in food on the Icelandic market. Information from databases is useful, among other things, in a national survey of the diet of the people, in an international comparison of the wholesomeness of raw materials, and in monitoring food safety. ÍS GEM will also be made more user-friendly.

21. A survey of the diet of Icelanders, both children and adults, will be conducted on a regular basis. The survey will be prepared by an interdisciplinary working group that will present a proposal, cost, and financing plan for the implementation of the survey.

Goal: To ensure the regular conduct of national dietary surveys. There have been surveys of the diet of the people implemented irregularly so far and, despite the will, it has not been possible to ensure implementation on a regular basis.

22. *The recommendations of the Directorate of Health on diet increasingly takes into account a sustainable diet.*

Goal: To continue with the recommendations in the direction of placing greater emphasis on environmental issues, taking factors such as the carbon footprint of food, resource utilization, production methods, food waste, etc. into account.

23. *An assessment will be made of the quality of school meals in primary and lower secondary schools in collaboration with the Association of Icelandic Municipalities.*

Goal: To ensure that children receive healthy food in accordance with their nutritional needs. A similar quality audit will be performed in hospitals and rest homes in collaboration with their operators. Subsequently, proposals will be made for improvements so that wholesomeness and health can be increased and waste reduced.

24. *An analysis will be made of the diet of Icelanders and access to healthy food (social as well as demographic factors will be considered).*

Goal: On the basis of the analysis, proposals will be made for ways, including economic incentives, to improve public health and promote public access to healthy foods as well as to reduce consumption of unhealthy foods.

25. *A prevention plan and an education plan will be formulated that follows policies on public health and nutrition.*

Goal: To ensure a coordinated plan and implementation of prevention and education in the broadest sense of the term prevention.

26. *A forum for consultation between the Directorate of Health, educational institutions, producers, shops, consumers, and other stakeholders will be established.*

Goal: To ensure increased consultation between the main professionals on ways to improve public health, improve consumption habits, and incentivize the production of healthy foods.

27. *Sorting and recycling will be harmonized throughout the country with the ideology of the circular economy as a guiding light. Landfilling will be limited as much as possible.*

Goal: To reduce waste, increase recycling, and make it easier for people to recycle correctly by harmonizing an approach all over the country.

28. *An action plan will be drawn up to reduce the use of plastics in the food industry.*

Goal: To reduce the unnecessary use of plastic in food production and increase the use of environmentally friendly food packaging materials without threatening food security.

29. Reduce food waste in the entire food value chain.

Goal: To reduce food waste in line with the Climate Action Plan, United Nations Global Objective, and an action plan against food waste.

30. The utilization of food on the market will be reviewed.

Goal: To reduce food waste and improve utilization. Regulations on the right of return, sale, recycling and utilization of food for purposes other than human consumption will be reviewed.

31. Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture.

Goal: To reduce greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture in accordance with the climate change action plan.

Attachments:

No Attachments.