



Sustainable Food Systems Ireland

A partnership of Irish Government agencies

Welcome to SFSI's first update of 2026 including news on project activities, key messages being used by SFSI and links to papers and articles of interest for sustainable food systems.

- > Zambia Ireland Food Systems Strengthening Programme Updates
- > Ireland Vietnam Agri-food Partnership (IVAP) - a busy end to 2025
- > Delivering a Pilot Breeding Programme with the Turkish Cypriot Community under the EU's eunite Programme
- > Agri-food in the Ireland-United Arab Emirates bilateral Joint Economic Commission
- > Spotlight: Closing the Gap: Zambia's Ambitious 2030 Nutrition Target

Zambia Ireland Food Systems Strengthening Programme (ZISSL)



In October, SFSI welcomed Kevin Kabunda, Zambia In-Country Lead for ZISSL, to Ireland. During the visit, Kevin gained exposure to Ireland's agri-food landscape through meetings with colleagues at FSAI, DFAT HQ, Enterprise Ireland, Bord Bia and Trinity College Dublin. A highlight was Kevin's meeting with CEO of FSAI, Greg Dempsey, Director of Enforcement Policy, Dr Bernard Hegarty, and OCR Manager, Carol Heavey, discussing food safety protocols in Ireland and its contribution to resilient food systems.

The itinerary also included a trip to Cork, where Kevin was introduced to Teagasc Moorepark animal and grassland research facility and the National Food Innovation Hub. Teagasc facilitated connections with colleagues from the Teagasc/SFSI project in Tanzania *Maziwa Faida* (Successful Dairying) in collaboration with Teagasc's partner institution, the Tanzania Livestock Research Institute (TALIRI). That programme has strengthened smallholder dairy research and extension services, supporting smallholder farming households in the Tanga region. These exchanges underline opportunities for regional cooperation to enhance food and nutrition security in Eastern and Southern Africa.



Throughout Q4 SFSI One Health expert Paula Barry Walsh and Kevin Kabunda provided technical support to UN FAO, Center for Infectious Disease Research Zambia (CIDRZ) and the Zambian Medicines Regulator (ZAMRA) on animal disease surveillance and the regulation of animal remedies. In December, a comprehensive One Health Baseline Study was finalised and [launched](#). The Study gathered insights from small and medium-sized livestock and crop farmers, food processors, buyers, retailers and regulators across multiple provinces in Zambia. The findings highlight encouraging progress in the adoption of One Health principles, while also identifying clear opportunities to strengthen collaboration and implementation. Overall, the research provides a strong foundation for deepening connections between people, animals, food systems, and the environment in Zambia.



Throughout Q4, SFSI Food Safety experts Michelle Riblet and Nicola Bonnefoy worked closely with the Ministry of Health to support the review of the Food Safety Policy Act in Zambia. Their collaboration with ZATP II (Zambia Agribusiness and Trade Project) will contribute to strengthening risk analysis in official controls in Zambia. In December, Nicola and Plant Health Specialist, Gabriel Roe travelled to Zambia to support import controls to safeguard food safety, plant health and crop quality. These supports are vital to protect both public health and small-scale producers, who are the backbone of food production in Zambia.

During Q4, SFSI Food Systems Specialist Sinead Mowlds engaged with the Office of the Vice President and National Food and Nutrition Commission, providing food systems support and policy action on stunting - a condition affecting 35% of children under 5 in Zambia. These consultations contribute to addressing this national development priority for better health outcomes and food systems resilience.

Ireland Vietnam Agri-food Partnership (IVAP)



In Q4 there were two team visits to Vietnam under IVAP. In early November Joe O'Flaherty, John Rae and Aoife Roche travelled to Hanoi to participate in the inaugural Vietnam–Ireland Dialogue in Agri-Food Systems Transformation. This was attended by key stakeholders across the agri-food sector in Vietnam, including senior representatives from government agencies, the Irish Embassy in Vietnam (including Ambassador Deirdre Ní Phallúin and Deputy Head of Mission Ronan Cunniffe), other embassies and international organisations such as FAO and ILRI. *Viet Nam Agriculture and Nature Newspaper* (VAN) co-hosted the event which was MC'd by John Rae.

Dr Tuấn, Director General of the International Cooperation Department of the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment described Ireland and Vietnam's relationship in food systems as "*strategic policy partnership*" which has supported national biosecurity, food safety management systems and enhanced market access.

The team also attended the launch of the EU funded Bord Bia Dairy Marketing Campaign - "[Where Nature Meets Science](#)", showcasing Irish grass-fed and functional dairy ingredient offerings available to the market.



Our SFSI food safety specialists have developed a status quo report on food safety directly impacting public health, and used the mission to validate findings with counterparts. This diagnostic review seeks to highlight the current strengths and weaknesses of Vietnam's food safety control system and identify feasible opportunities for improvement. This information will also influence the future of IVAP's food safety work package and our engagement with key actors in the area.

Our important work with the National Institute of Science (NIAS) and the Vietnamese Cooperative Alliance (VCA) has continued throughout this period, despite significant obstacles to the research implementation including weather events and disease outbreaks affecting fieldwork.

Eunite Breeding Programme in the Turkish Cypriot community

Large steps have been made in our project in Cyprus. The participating sheep farms under the Eunite Pilot Breeding Programme had their very first DNA tissue samples taken for genotyping in September 2025. The project aims to optimise the economic viability and market presence of the Turkish Cypriot community (TCc) small ruminant dairy sector by updating sheep and goat breeding practices and strengthening the dairy value chain. The focus of this work is on increasing the supply of sheep and goat milk to boost the capacity of the dairy sector in the context of the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) status of Halloumi/Hellim.

This farmer-centric, industry-focused programme involves farm partnership agreements currently with two large sheep and goat farms, aiming to include a minimum of 9,500 ewes in the programme. The first Farm Participation Agreement was signed by SFSI Team Leader Michael Parker and the farm manager, Mahmut Gucel at the Mustafa

Haci Ali farm. This work was supported by the project's local veterinary expert Emre Bartu Cambaz, SFSI Dairy Value Chain Expert Michael Barry and many farm staff.



In November our team travelled to Nicosia to attend the Cyprus AgriFood Forum 2025! Over three inspiring days, the Forum brought together farmers, innovators, policymakers, and entrepreneurs, both communities, Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot from across the Island, to share ideas, build connections, and shape the future of sustainable agri-food in Cyprus. The event took place within the Green Line at the iconic [Ledra Palace Hotel](#), in the Green line. The event focused on three thematic areas - *Knowledge, Inclusion, and Sustainable Development, Resilient and Sustainable Food Systems and Market Competitiveness, and Innovation and Green Line Trade* and the event was well attended. The first day was filled with keynote speakers – including John Rae and Ignacio Mullins from Sheep Ireland, a key project partner, discussing competitive agri-food markets, innovation and genomics relating to our work with Eunite.



SFSI Represents DAFM at Joint Economic Commission (JEC) in UAE

SFSI represented DAFM at the first meeting of the Ireland - United Arab Emirates Joint Economic Commission (JEC) on the 10th December 2025 in Dubai. This marked a significant milestone in strengthening economic ties between the two countries and created a framework for the Ireland-UAE partnership to grow in the years ahead. The JEC emphasised enhanced cooperation in Climate Smart Agriculture and innovation in agri-food technology for enhanced Food Security. His Excellency H.E. Saeed Bin Mubarak Al Hajeri commended Ireland as a small nation with “big values and ambition”.

By leveraging each country's strengths, collaboration could support innovation for sustainability. DAFM joined four other Departments, with the Irish delegation led by Ministers Darragh O'Brien T.D. and Peter Burke T.D.



Other News

- In December 2025, SFSI and implementing partners Economic Sense and MwAPATA signed a Multiyear contract to continue implementing the Ireland Malawi Agri-food Systems Programme (IMAGRI) funded by the Embassy of Ireland in Lilongwe. Activities focus on enhancing Malawi's food safety regulatory system, food systems transformation and inclusive enterprise growth.
- In July 2025, SFSI welcomed 26 young African agri-food professionals to Ireland under the FAO HASTEN project to inspire food systems change and harness visionary leadership. The Study Tour was documented and features on **FAO's YouTube channel**: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEFQqdbC_iq&t=2s
- In November, SFSI food systems specialist, Sinead Mowlds led a panel discussion at the Annual IFIAD conference *Rethinking Agricultural Trade for Food Security and Nutrition*. The panel discussed opportunities and barriers for EU and African Union trade.



- SFSI Project Coordinators Aoife Roche and Niamh Whelan represent SFSI at the National Ploughing Championships in September, alongside our friends from IFIAD and Irish Aid.



Spotlight: Closing the Gap: Zambia's Ambitious 2030 Nutrition Target

While stunting rates in Zambia have been declining by roughly 1% annually, the Government has set an ambitious target to reach 15% by 2030 from the current 35% - a goal that requires more than doubling current progress.

In its support for the strategy development process led by the Office of the Vice President (OVP) and the National Food and Nutrition Commission (NFNC), SFSI's created a briefing note, *Leveraging Zambia's Food Systems Transformation Pathways to Reduce Stunting*. This emphasises that stunting is a multi-sectoral challenge, driven by a complex interplay of dietary diversity, maternal health, and environmental factors like water and sanitation. The brief aligns Zambia's national target to reduce stunting to 15 % by 2030 with the country's Food Systems Transformation Pathways, identifying priority, cross-sector actions across agriculture, health, food safety and livelihoods. Applying a systems approach helps to move thinking from a conventional health approach to multi-sectoral interventions.

◎ Stunting Causes & Food Systems Response

Immediate Causes

- Poor dietary diversity
- Recurrent infections
- Suboptimal infant-feeding

Underlying Drivers

- Limited nutrient-dense foods
- Weak health & WASH services
- Gender inequities & poverty

↗ Six Integrated Intervention Areas

↳ Agricultural Production

Diversifying crops (legumes, vegetables, fruit), strengthening value-chains, improving market access

↳ Policy Integration

Aligning subsidies with nutrition goals, embedding nutrition in broader policies

↳ Health & WASH Services

Nutrition education, infant-feeding practices, hygiene promotion

↳ Social Protection

Cash transfers, vouchers for pregnant women & children, affordability support

↳ Resilience Building

Local storage, women's cooperatives, early-warning systems

↳ Intergenerational Focus

Adolescent girls, pregnant women, caregivers at policy center

○ Why Food Systems Approach Works

→ Coherent Action

Identifies synergies across sectors, ensures coordinated interventions

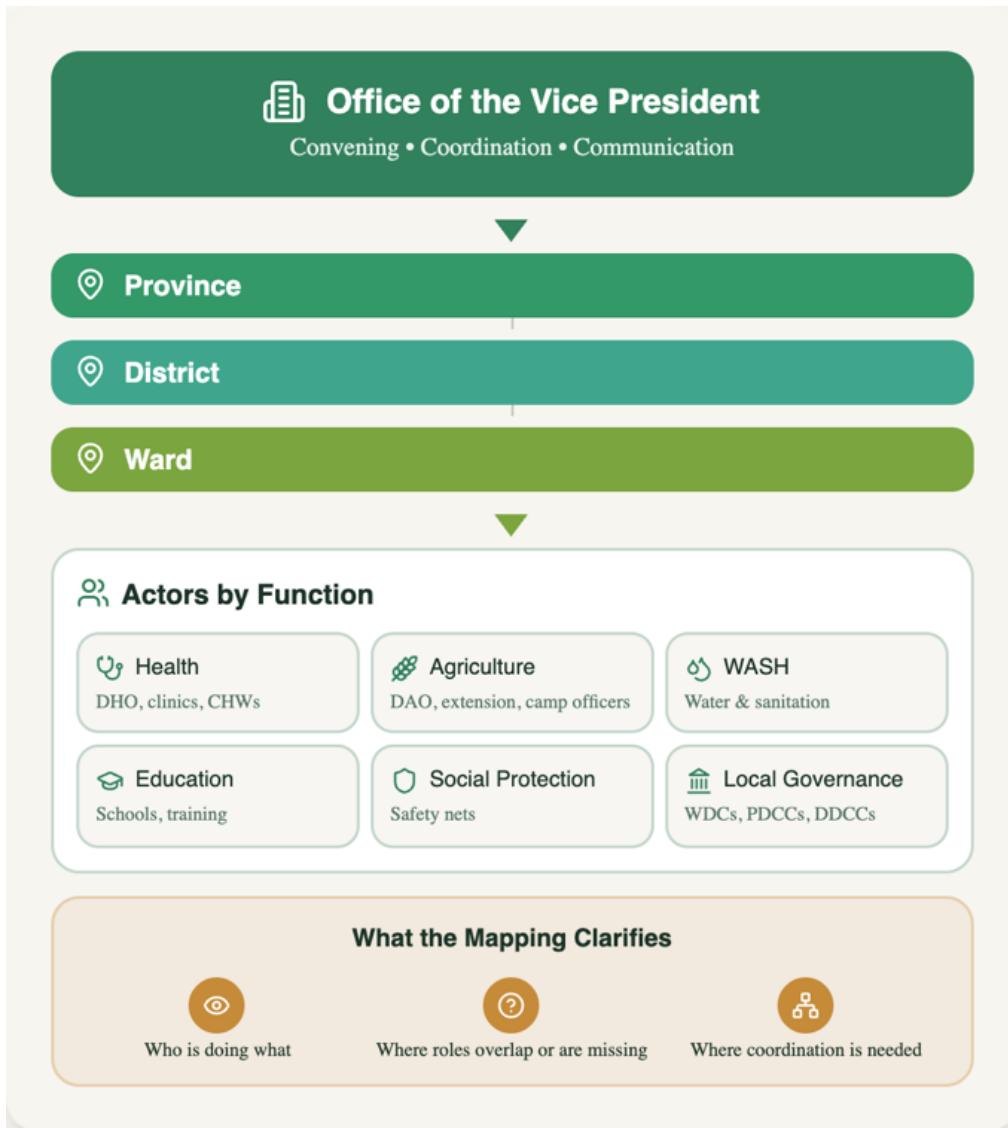
→ Systems Resilience

Anticipates & mitigates climatic, economic, health-related shocks

→ Intergenerational Impact

Breaks cycles of undernutrition through targeted interventions

As a next step, we will expand this work to include subnational mapping to ensure that food systems transformation is not just a national concept but a practical framework for local policy action to break the intergenerational cycle of undernutrition. By mapping institutional roles at the provincial and district levels, we aim to provide local authorities with a clear roadmap for coordinated action, helping to accelerate progress toward the 15% national stunting target.



Recent Publications

[Annual Review and Outlook for Agriculture, Food and the Marine 2024 -2025](#)

[One Health Baseline Report for Zambia](#)

Thank you also to the SFSI community for your dedication and hard work during this Quarter. We look forward to working with you in 2026!