

Work under way to boost sustainability

Empowering people to make thoughtful food choices to support more sustainable agriculture is essential in the battle on climate change.

That was one of the arguments put forward at Green Food and Drink: Sustainable Production and Procurement organised by Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce in partnership with City of Edinburgh Council.

The aim was to highlight on-going work to tackle climate change as Scotland hosts the COP26 UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow.

The event heard that work is underway to create a more sustainable food chain in Scotland and the UK, around soil carbon, water management, rewilding and a host of other topics. However, more needs to be done to help consumers gain access to truthful and accurate information and to debunk “some unhelpful myths.”

And one expert warned that even concerned national governments are making choices that risk “unintended consequences” that may hinder, rather than help, the fight against deforestation.

Dr Fiona Borthwick, an expert on global food security and nutrition at the University of Edinburgh, said that creating a sustainable system needed to be carefully and holistically approached, looking at growing, aggregation, processing, transport, waste and considering social and health issues.

“The problem of moving to a sustainable food system is complex and involves different stages. We need to have sound evidence in order to make good decisions that don’t lead to other knock-on effects or rebounds.”

Alan Laidlaw, chief executive of the Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland, stressed that enormous work was on-going across all sectors of farming in the UK to provide greater sustainability.

He also called for a move away from the “binary arguments” of vegetarianism v meat-eating and dairy versus plant-based to a more thoughtful and considered approach.

Many people sought out almond milk as an alternative to dairy they believed was sustainable, he said, yet almonds grown largely on the west coast of the USA require 54 inches of water per year in areas where rainfall is just 4 inches – requiring wasteful water use and with massive transport requirements.

Hamish Torrie, director of CSR and Communications Director at Glenmorangie, said the company’s distillery on the Dornoch Firth had an anaerobic digestion plant which returns 97 per cent pure wastewater from the distillery’s spring to the Cromarty Firth.

To further improve water quality, the company is supporting the growing of an oyster reef. Oysters (pictured) existed in the Dornoch Firth till around 100 years ago and Mr Torrie said: “Oysters are fantastic filtrators of water.

“One native oyster can filter up to 200 litres of water a day and clean it up and so oyster reefs become havens for biodiversity and they have an ability to lock up carbon.”

By last year 20,000 oysters had been returned to the water with a target of 200,000 by 2023 and four million by 2028

Mr Torrie added: “Edinburgh once had an oyster reef 20 miles long by six miles wide in the Firth of Forth, all been eaten by humans, and all gone.”