R E P O R T

Green Foundation Ireland,
in collaboration with
Climate Justice Universities' Union *(CJUU)* and
Technological University of the Shannon *(TUS),*
invite you to an all-day conference

SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

What is the role of universities in making Ireland's food system more sustainable?

Photo by: STIOFÁN NUTTY

Venue: **Room B54, TUS Athlone**
University Road, Athlone, County Westmeath, N37 HD68

Thursday 17 February 2026 – 09:30 to 16:00

SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

What is the role of universities in making Ireland's food system more sustainable?

THEME

The theme of this event was Sustainable Food Systems. The discussions on the day focused on related issues including food sovereignty, agroecology, food poverty and healthy food.

ABOUT THE CONFERENCE PARTNERS

Climate Justice Universities' Union *(CJUU)* is a transboundary and transdisciplinary international collective leveraging the potential of higher education for transformative change. Its goal is to transform higher education to accelerate a just transition and advance climate justice. It is a union with members representing higher education institutions, diverse and creative communities, civil society organisations, and others. The Union was formed on the island of Ireland but welcomes members from all parts of the world.

Technological University of the Shannon *(TUS)* is a multi-campus university spread across seven campuses throughout Ireland's Midwest and Midlands region. With principal campuses at Limerick and Athlone, it benefits from an already strong and vibrant history of education and learning in the wider region, and will continue to play its part in sustaining and enhancing this identity for generations to come. TUS' Vision to 2030 is to be a catalyst for sustainable change through education and research that transforms lives, the region and the world beyond.

ABOUT OUR FACILITATOR

Director of Green Foundation Ireland, **Darragh Wynne** is the Sustainability Co-Ordinator in Technological University of the Shannon. He is the founder and co-host of the **Climate Alarm Clock** podcast, an Irish news podcast which has been running since 2021. Darragh completed an MSc in Climate Change: Media, Policy and Society in DCU in 2020 and has previously worked for GOAL Global, as a part-time lecturer in Global Citizenship in DCU and on the Project Team for the Children's and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss in 2022.

ABOUT OUR CONFERENCE

Darragh Wynne opened the conference by welcoming everyone and providing context to the event, as well as introducing GFI and event partner TUS, while **Clare Kelly** introduced CJUU to the attendees.

Ruth Hegarty of **Food Policy Ireland** delivered the keynote speech entitled *Do Universities want to transform the food system?* This focused on food service delivery in universities, mentioning the prominence of ultra-processed foods (UPFs) and unhealthy food, as well as the lack of engagement with local producers. The session also covered positive and negative research approaches to food systems carried out by universities. The comment was made that this seems like an impossible task, the system is complex, and the sector is dominated by powerful entities. Changes in land use and food production are among the leading drivers of disease emergence in humans. Challenge for universities lies in what is taught and also what is procured.

Lisa Fingleton, who ran the **Ballybunion Bean Festival** in August 2025, spoke about her work with the community in Ballybunion in County Kerry, **Brilliant Ballybunion** which is all about growing food locally and the organisation of the bean festival. The project attracted €250,000 in funding and has been a great success – she was really Inspiring.

A round table discussion allowed attendees to give their own perspectives. Some farmers spoke about their willingness to engage with researchers but that the relationship must be collaborative rather than exploitative. Others commented on UPFs.

The panel discussion consisted of **Jacinta Dalton**, Head of Culinary Arts at the Atlantic Technological University in Galway, and **Anna Brown** of **Talamh Beo** (who introduced their principles and approach, noting their **Local Food Policy** document). The session was chaired by **John Barry** who is Professor of Green Political Economy at the School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics in Queen's University Belfast, as well as a Director of Green Foundation Ireland. This discussion focused on the difficulty of getting access to good food, the need to support local food production. A major challenge for small producers is they have to follow the same rules that apply to the big producers, scale of production is working against them and the consumer. From the universities' perspective there are challenges with budgets and the whole tendering process. Jacinta highlighted ways she has worked with local producers within this system.

A 4th year hospitality student brought attendees on a tour of TUS polytunnel and bokashi composting system.

Tunnel Composting Tour

TUS staff who are engaged with work-related to food systems spoke about what they are involved with, including research projects related to market gardening as well as the use of hydroponic towers to grow herbs with culinary students.

Breakout sessions predominantly involved informal discussions and each group fed back to the room.

Darragh thanked everyone for attending and formally closed the conference.

*You can **view a short video of our event here***

and

*you can **see more photos of our event here**.*

Green Foundation Ireland ***16 March 2026***