

NOURISH SCOTLAND BRIEFING PAPER: GOOD FOOD NATION – A SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT DISCUSSION PAPER

Background

1. The Scottish Government recently launched a discussion paper "[Becoming a Good Food Nation](#)". Anyone with an interest in food can respond to this by Friday 17 October 2014. Responses should be sent to goodfoodnation@scotland.gsi.gov.uk. The Scottish Government is keen to hear your food stories, personal pledges and ideas on how Scotland can become a Good Food Nation. Nourish would strongly encourage anyone interested in food in to contribute. This paper briefly summarises the consultation document and highlights what we think some of the major issues, and possible responses, might be.

Aspiration

2. The paper sets out the Scottish Government's aspiration that Scotland should become a Good Food Nation where it is second nature to serve, sell and eat fresh, healthy food and where food – which is tasty to eat, nutritious, fresh and environmentally sustainable - is a key part of what makes people proud of Scotland. The document "aims to open up a platform for conversations" about food across the country.

Context

Successes

3. The paper welcomes the progress made in the food and drink sector, and celebrates the successes so far. The sector is fast growing. Targets on exports and turnover growth have been exceeded and the value of food and drink exports (and sales within the UK) is rising fast. The paper lists successes such as
 - Improved collaboration between the industry and public sector, for example through the work of Scotland Food and Drink
 - Promotion of well-known Scottish products through protecting their food names (for example, Stornoway Black Pudding, Orkney Cheddar and others)
 - Increased number of Farmers' markets
 - Greater focus on public procurement, with a new procurement act and a sustainable food charter for the Commonwealth Games
 - Improvements on school meals and diet-related issues, through initiatives such as product reformulation, helping manufacturers make their products healthier; and
 - The creation of more than 150 new local food initiatives.

Investment and Activity

4. The paper also describes Scottish Government activities and investment in education and community work, such as
 - Opportunities for pupils to learn about food through programmes such as Food for Life, Crofting Connections, the Healthier Cooking bus and the introduction of Curriculum for Excellence
 - Awareness raising campaigns on seasonal eating, food waste, and healthier

eating

- Work with industry bodies to increase fruit and vegetable sales and reduce commercial food waste; and
- Work with community groups to deliver community health and climate related projects which include food aspects.

Challenges

5. The paper also flags up areas where there is “unfinished business”. It describes a Scotland where we have world famous food exports such as salmon, oats and whisky but still have world-beating levels of diet-related disease and an uneasy relationship with our food. The paper highlights both practical issues and issues about how we view food, our deep-seated poor diet habits and our low expectations as consumers. Issues outlined in the paper include

- Poor diets that contribute to increased levels of poor health from conditions like diabetes, heart disease and obesity. Fruit and vegetable consumption in poorer communities has fallen during the recession and diet related ill health contributes significantly to high health care costs
- People feel disconnected from food and don’t know how and where it is made
- The market is dominated by a few success stories such as salmon, shortbread and whisky. We need to diversify our products and develop new markets
- The global food system is increasingly vulnerable to climate change and other threats. We need to invest in our supply chains so they can cope with this.
- We waste 1/5th of the food we buy each year, which contributes to greenhouse gas emissions. Worldwide, food production and consumption accounts for a third of all emissions.

A new vision for food in Scotland

6. The Scottish Government’s vision is that *by 2025, people from every walk of life will take pride and pleasure in the food served day by day in Scotland. An increase in Scottish food exports will attract overseas visitors and the quality of the food we serve will become one of the key reasons to travel to Scotland. Everyone will know what constitutes good food and why. All players in Scottish life – from schools to hospitals, retailers, restaurants and food manufacturers – will be committed to serving such food. Its ready availability will have contributed to improvements in children’s wellbeing and hence outcomes. Scottish suppliers will have developed their offering so that local increasingly equals fresh, healthy and environmentally sound. The most intractable dietary-related diseases will have begun to decline as will the environmental impact locally and worldwide, of our food consumption. The food industry will be a thriving well-known feature of local and national economies, with each part of Scotland rightly proud of its culinary heritage, past and present.*

Getting there

7. The Scottish Government will create a Scottish Food Commission whose remit will be to advocate for the importance of food to the Scotland’s health, environment, economy and quality of life and to identify and champion measures that they believe will contribute the most to making Scotland a Good Food Nation. This will include

advising on spending priorities and agreeing high-level indicators to show progress. It will involve around 15 members drawn from public and private sectors, covering economy, health, environment and education amongst other areas. They will also maintain and deploy a network of “local food champions” across the country. The paper also states that the Scottish Government will work closely to ensure effective co-ordination of food, health and local government bodies and will align priorities between government agencies.

Early Priorities

8. The Scottish Government proposes early action in 5 key areas. These are:

Public Sector Food

9. The public sector should lead by example, championing fresh, local, seasonal and sustainable produce and celebrating ethical sourcing and good provenance. It should ensure food in public settings is nutritious and inspiring and provide leadership to achieve this. This can deliver public health, social justice and economic benefits, for example by offering improved opportunities for smaller producers and social enterprises to gain contracts.

Children’s Food Policy

10. Focussing on children can positively influence their eating habits and their development. Opportunities for food and health related learning should be further developed along with continuing efforts to improve the attractiveness and nutrition of school meals. Other work might include developing a bespoke children’s food policy, ensuring access to healthy food, ensuring children understand where their food comes from and how it is made and working to increase physical activity levels.

Local Food

11. The paper suggests working with communities to embed change relevant to their circumstances, to increase sustainable food production and extend its reach beyond the middle classes. The aim is to ensure that everyone has the opportunity, skills and confidence to access an affordable, healthy and balanced diet. This may require higher spending on healthier living programmes or the creation of community food hubs as well as building on provisions in the recently published Community Empowerment Bill. These include provisions on allotments and community growing, extending the community right to buy to urban areas, strengthening community planning and provisions allowing asset transfer to community groups.

Good Food Choices

12. Efforts will continue on behaviour change issues, building up a knowledge and evidence base about what works, simplifying key messages and delivery mechanisms and ensuring any approach celebrates our food and is class neutral.

Continued economic growth

13. Measures to support economic growth will continue, while addressing health, community, dietary and environmental issues. A new export strategy will be implemented and support will be provided to primary producers and industry organisations. There will also be work to improve training, encourage increased research and innovation and streamline support and to strengthen the local food economy and shorten supply chains.

What about me?

14. The Scottish Government is keen to hear all views and will be providing opportunities to feed into this process nationally and locally. Comments will also be forwarded to the Scottish Food Commission when it is appointed. Nourish wants to see lots of producers, processors, community groups, social enterprises, policy makers and individuals with an interest in food respond. We can't - and won't - tell you what you should think. But here are a few of the questions and issues that we think are important to consider.

Talking Points

15. *Do you agree with the vision? Are the words "Good Food nation" right? Is the vision too detailed or not detailed enough? Are there things missing from it? Can all these things be achieved at once?* In many ways it is difficult to argue with the vision of educated, well informed individuals eating a healthy, nutritious, sustainably produced diet, in a country with a thriving food-led economy. Nourish welcomes the bringing together of various strands of work related to food, as too often food policy has been split with various departments leading on, for example, health, economy and environment.

16. However, it still feels like the emphasis is on food as an economic driver rather than food as a way of developing our communities. Although the paper discusses diet related ill health and the need for good food to be available to everyone, there is no real focus on food poverty, no mention of food banks or focus on removing health inequalities. And while the paper talks about "good" food, it does not set out what this means in environmental or social terms. The paper is notably silent on organic farming and does not draw out the links between food production and bio-diversity or soil or habitat conservation. It also glosses over how our European Agriculture and Fisheries Funds (of more than £500 million) could be used to develop a more sustainable food and fisheries system, which can deliver public benefits in environmental, cultural, public health and economic terms.

17. *Do you agree with the proposal to appoint a Good Food Commission? What should it focus on? Who should be members?* Nourish agrees with this proposal, but believes a transparent appointment process is necessary. The number of proposed members is probably about right. Too few members and not enough interests are represented. Too many and decisions are never made and conclusions are not drawn. We think members should be drawn from the health, primary production, processing and catering, environmental, economic development, trade, retail, education, local authority and community development sectors. Minutes of meetings and reports should be publicly available. An early focus should be on determining priorities and indicators of progress, along with aligning government policies.

18. *Are there other areas that need to be represented on the Good Food Commission? Or other steps that need to be taken by the Commission?* The Scottish Government needs to be clear about its broad priorities and how the work of the Commission will feed into this. Is the Commission there to represent the interests of wider society? Or are they there to hear the evidence and provide a balanced view? Are some

priorities, for example, export growth, tackling food poverty, or improving the Scottish diet more important than others?

19. *What government policies need to be aligned? Are there areas where policies conflict or stop you doing things that would contribute to making Scotland a Good Food Nation?* Nourish's experience of dealing with government policies over the past year is that:

- National planning policies and local development plans rarely consider any issues relating to food production, retail or distribution. If we are going to supply our cities and urban areas with more local food then land needs to be made available for both commercial and community based growing. We also need space for local value-added processing and the development of a more diverse retail offering. This may require further land reform as well as more sympathetic planning policies.
- Environmental and climate change related policies hardly mention food despite the often-quoted figures about food being responsible for a third of our GHG emissions.
- Industry-led measures to improve diet issues or to restrict market of unhealthy food choices are often reliant on voluntary co-operation and informal agreements. We need real levers (tax, planning, competition, business rates policies) that favour sustainable food production to provide incentives and to make real change.
- There is considerable public money going into primary production and rural development. The Scottish Government needs to be much more explicit about the public benefits that are expected to result from this spending.
- Debate on environmental issues associated with food and on food poverty and community health almost always takes place at arms-length from each other. These issues need to be brought together to come up with sustainable solutions. The Commission will need to consider how to address these and other issues.
- Not enough attention is paid to the role our cities play in our food system. The emerging work on sustainable food cities is a start, although the work is comparatively under-resourced. Our cities drive much of the demand in our food system and if can feed them sustainably and minimise waste we can also generate significant local economic and community benefits.

20. *Can you or your organisation become local food champions? What can you do to make Scotland a Good Food Nation? Could you*

- *Make food a bigger or more important part of what you do in your social enterprise, business or agency?*
- *Grow, make or buy more local food, promote more sustainable, local food or celebrate local food or food traditions in your area?*
- *Volunteer to help set up a local community food hub to help make good food more widely available and to allow people to access food and advice, skills and training in a local and accessible place?*
- *Work with other agencies, traders, businesses and community groups to raise awareness of food issues, lobby decision makers or co-operate in developing*

local solutions?

- *Help develop or recommend particular indicators that will show progress on health inequalities, environment, community or economic issues?*

21. *Is the focus on the 5 priority areas of good food choices, continued economic growth, local food, children's food policy and public sector food correct? Are there areas missing? Is the emphasis right?* Nourish agrees that these are all worthy issues. However, there are three areas that we would recommend receive more attention. These are the tackling food poverty and developing alternatives to food banks, encouraging more new sustainable food start-ups (whether community or business based) and ensuring more resilience and sustainability in the food system. The food on our supermarket shelves is vulnerable due to the effects of climate change, extreme weather events and the impact of changing demand in other parts of the world. (For example, parts of our livestock and poultry sector rely on imported foods such as soya, for which demand is rising).
22. We need a more joined-up approach to encouraging better food choices. Existing behavioural change messages such as "5 a day" are recognised by most people. But although we know the message we don't always follow it. We need to invest more resources in this area. The Scottish Government is using a new behaviour change framework "Individual, Social and Material" (ISM) in other areas and perhaps this could be used here.
23. Is there still too much emphasis on food as an export commodity? Many of the products we export are not especially healthy, (shortbread, tablet, whisky). Should we be aiming to diversify our production and capitalise on healthier products? Given the success of this sector does it require more Scottish Government support or should that support be focussed on more underperforming areas?
24. Nourish would like to hold several consultation events around Scotland to discuss the ideas raised here. However, to do this we would need help from our local members in identifying venues and publicising events. If you would be interested in holding an event near you, please contact us (ideally by the start of September) and discuss what support we can offer. Please email tracey@nourishscotland.org.uk or call us on 0131 226 1497. Alternatively, send your views directly to the Scottish Government by Friday 17 October to goodfoodnation@scotland.gsi.gov.uk.