

Nourish Scotland

Summary of Consultation events on the Scottish Government's Good Food Nation

Background

1. During the month of September, Nourish Scotland undertook a series of meetings around Scotland in relation to the Scottish Government's discussion document "Good Food Nation". Meetings were organised in a number of different regions and in association with a variety of partner bodies. The meetings took place as follows:
 - Edinburgh, 4 September, University of Edinburgh, in association with the University of Edinburgh and Edible Edinburgh
 - Glasgow, 12 September, the Hidden Gardens, in association with the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens
 - Stirling, 16 September, Cowane's Hospital Trust, in association with Forth Environment Link
 - Falkland, 17 September, at the Falkland Centre for Stewardship, in association with the Fife Diet and Falkland Centre for Stewardship
 - Inverness, 24 September, Spectrum Centre, in association with the Scottish Crofting Federation
 - Moray, 26 September, Elgin Youth Café, in association with the Moray Food Network and Transition Town Forres
 - Borders, 26 September, Abbotsford House, in association with Borders Joint Health Improvement team
 - Aberdeen, 29 September, Merchant Bistro.
2. More than 230 people attended these meetings. In addition, Nourish spoke at the annual Scottish Smallholders conference in Lanark on 27 September, and highlighted issues from the GFN document there. A survey monkey was also produced which allowed respondents to input their views online. Copies of more than 30 completed survey monkey questionnaires will be sent to the Scottish Government Food and Drink team, along with summaries from the individual events referred to above. All the event summaries and photos taken at the meetings are now available online on the Nourish website at www.nourishscotland.org.

Event Format

3. The events were framed around 3 questions:
 - What do we think about the Scottish Government's ideas for becoming a Good Food Nation?
 - Is there more we need to do?
 - What can we do (as people and organisations) to make this happen?
4. The workshop activities were carried out in small groups. During the event the following issues were explored:
 - vision
 - springboard ideas on the proposals
 - priority areas
 - food commission considerations, and
 - some practical ideas for next steps.

The Vision

Positives

5. Most people felt positive about the vision set out in the Good Food Nation document. We asked every group to underline the aspects of the vision that they were most attracted to and which they felt should be non-negotiable if Scotland is to become a Good Food Nation. The most commonly underlined phrases were:
 - People from every walk of life will take pride and pleasure/All players in Scottish life....
 - Everyone will know what constitutes good food and why
 - Scotland's suppliers will have developed their offerings so that local increasingly equals fresh, healthy and environmentally sound.
 - The most intractable dietary-related illnesses will have begun to decline as will the environmental impact....of our food consumption.

Gaps

6. A few attendees felt that the vision was too long or were concerned about how achievable it was. We asked people to tell us where they felt the vision was lacking or if there were things missing from the vision. The most common issues raised were:
 - A need to be clear about what good food means and to ensure that understanding is widely shared
 - A need to address issues of food security, food poverty and the increasing use of food banks
 - More emphasis needed on the social justice aspects of food and on how we feed our nation
 - Linked to this is a need to develop new structures which may be community based, social enterprise led or co-operative in nature to allow communities to help themselves
 - More emphasis on safeguarding the environment and more support for sustainable production, such as organic farming
 - Many contributors wanted to see less focus on exports and economic growth.

Priorities

7. We asked people to look at the priorities suggested in the document. We asked groups to examine both what was missing across the board and what aspects might be missing from within the existing priorities set out. The most commonly listed missing priority areas or topics were:
 - A sense that the priority areas are interdependent or linked and that priority should be given to ensuring effective linkages and joined up action across the areas
 - A need to address issues such as food security, food poverty, availability, access and affordability of good food
 - A need to develop our understanding of what good food is and educate people about this
 - Education was seen as crucial to ensuring behaviour change and encouraging better food choices. However, we need to educate everyone and not just children.
 - Knowledge sharing and skills development is needed across the board, for food businesses, communities and in the home
 - Access to land needs to be addressed. Without this, there will be no sustainable production and no local food.
8. Within the priorities, the following themes emerged:

Children's Food

- Having children's food as a priority is too limited an aspiration. We need to extend education to parents, families and communities and ensure education takes place beyond the school gate
- Education is crucial to changing behavioural patterns. But if we focus just on children then this might be undone at home.
- The curriculum should have hands on experience of food from plough to plate. Children should be actively involved in growing, preparing and eating food as well as receiving nutritional information
- Opportunities for inter-generational learning should be actively sought out and schools should work in partnership with food businesses and the third sector to deliver the curriculum

Good Food Choices

- We need to consider the impact of sugar as well as fat on our diets and health. We also need to examine whether the marketing and promotion of high sugar or fat foods should be regulated.
- We need to consider whether we can restrict the availability of or increase the price of unhealthy foods or if we can subsidise the availability of healthier options
- We need to consider what happens to those who don't or can't make their own food choices. For example, what about food in educational establishments, workplaces, prisons, care homes. We need to ensure tasty and healthier options are available here.
- We need to create and nurture community based opportunities for people to learn about food and nutrition, to try new things, learn new skills and meet new people.

Continued Economic Growth

- Many people expressed concerns about the continued emphasis on economic growth. Some argued for alternative terms or definitions such as sustainable economic development to be used, while others saw a clear tension between developing local food and continued economic growth.
- We need to consider how we can encourage and promote sustainable production, especially for smaller producers
- We need to support the development of new structures and routes to market.
- Where public money is given out, under CAP, CFP or SRDP, it needs to be granted in return for securing clear public benefits rather than subsidising private incomes

Local Food

- We have to make local food available, accessible and affordable
- We need better linkages between producers and people.
- We have to invest in supply chain development and in infrastructure such as covered markets, transport links, dairies and abattoirs, bakeries and fish markets.

Public Sector Food

9. While this is a small percentage of overall spending, it provides a real opportunity to champion local food. This will require:
 - Adequate budgets in purchasing authorities
 - Clear guidance on how sustainable procurement can be used to deliver community and local benefit
 - An understanding that value for money is more than cost-per-unit or volume
 - A willingness to tender in smaller bundles
 - Support for producers to meet the requirements of public sector bodies

- There may be an opportunity for some choice-editing , by removing healthier options from menus and promoting healthier, local, sustainably produced options.

The Food Commission

10. The Good Food Nation document proposes setting up a Scottish Food Commission, although the paper does not give a clear steer on how the Commission would be set up, what it would look like or how it would operate. When considering whether we should have a Food Commission we asked attendees to reflect on questions such as:
 - What would its remit be? Why does it exist? Who does it exist for?
 - What would its tasks be?
 - Who would be involved and how?
 - What would its powers be? How democratic would it be?
 - How independent would it be?
 - Who would it report to?
11. Attendees were then asked to comment on 2 questions:
 - What is the most important thing for the commission to do?
 - What is the most important thing in how it is run and set up?

The most important thing for the Commission to do

12. Most common answers or themes emerging in response to this question were:
 - To join up and rationalise existing activity and initiatives and spread best practice
 - To set strategic policy direction and lead long-term thinking
 - To consult, facilitate change, engage people, and bring partners together
 - To ensure the vision is realised
 - To focus on how we can achieve “good food for all” in Scotland and to transform our food culture.

The most important thing in how it is run and set up

13. Most common answers or themes emerging in response to this question were:
 - To include diverse views from different sectors; it must be inclusive
 - Be independent, accountable and transparent. This transparency should apply to the appointment of members as well as to how it conducts its operations
 - It must not be just another talking shop – it needs to have the powers to actually create and facilitate change

Conclusion

14. Attendees at the meetings were drawn from a wide variety of sectors including farming, fishing, horticulture and community growing, processing, health, community development, retail, food service and other businesses.
15. It was obvious to everyone involved in the consultation meetings that there was a wide interest in the issues raised. The meetings took place in the period straddling the referendum and it was apparent that many people had thought deeply about how food fitted into their experience of life in Scotland and how it could be used to make Scotland a better place. Contributors to the debates were articulate, enthusiastic and heartfelt in their desire to create a better, stronger, fairer food system in Scotland. We would urge the Scottish Government to capitalise on this interest in food related issues as it develops the proposals set out in this document.