CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

1. How important do you think it is that we aim to be a Good Food Nation?

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<td>I think it is an excellent idea!</td>
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It might be quite a challenge and will take time to overcome many hurdles. But it is not a far stretch to build on quality produce and extend that to building a reputation in quality food and drink.

2. How would we know when we had got there? What would success look like?

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<td>It’s a socio-cultural issue (see comment below) and challenging. A success story is when the bar has been significantly raised so that the majority of Scotland’s population now has higher expectations and demands on the quality and authenticity of food served and sold to them (Japan is a good case to look at if you are ambitious). For example when people appreciate the quality of staple food like bread.</td>
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A baseline will have to be set to measure the ‘bar’. Also think about measuring all the ‘touchpoints’ where food and drink is served besides the obvious, cafes, pubs restaurants.

Much like currently there are fish & chips outlets on every corner, success is when there is popular demand for proper bakeries in every residential area. Bakery refers to those bakers getting up early in the AM to make their own dough and bake fresh bread every day – not buying pre-fabricated dough from a factory.

My best quality food experience is a B&B in Lairg where the owner couple produced an amazing entirely home-made and locally sourced breakfast/brunch, with even their own hens/eggs and beehive/honey produced in their backyard. Success is once these experiences become the norm, when you can trust the source of food is good and sustainable.

A critical success factor is when we can all buy affordable fresh food, such as fruit, with costs in proportion to salary levels, not at the whim of supermarkets driven only by profit motives. As tying salary levels to cost of living levels is a larger economic issue, this may be harder to achieve quickly. (Although I’ve grown up in a small country Luxembourg, where this is the case, salaries automatically rising as mandated by law, each time the national level of cost of living increases.)

In the long run, success is when a reputation has been built and foreign media commonly report on Scottish ‘gastronomy’. I had to battle numerous negative comments about the food in Scotland (being lumped in with British food overall). Despite famous Scottish produce like smoked salmon, ales and whisky, the gastronomy as a whole is seen as separate – addressing
the reputation issue is therefore key.

3. Do you agree with the proposed vision? How would you improve it?

Comments
Again, I applaud the initiative. As it is an ambitious one, the social and cultural dimension plays a key part, or in other words, a cultural revolution has to take place to embed notions of what 'good food' means to sustain the long-term initiative. Good food is inevitably linked to authenticity. Authenticity needs to become obvious when tasting food, eg factory bread will never taste authentic no matter how much or little you manipulate the dough or baking process. As a social anthropologist who has worked in change management, I can only recommend that you plan for a holistic socio-cultural transformation if you are serious about the initiative.

And such transformation doesn't happen overnight, it takes time, as your statement notes. To motivate change in the desired direction, you can create incentives rewarding people for the desired behaviour and to create more demand for trustworthy food produce. Social change cannot happen without economic change. People cannot be expected to start buying fresh produce if that comes at a price they cannot afford. Sustainable farming, health & fitness and economic wellbeing will all need to be in place before you can promote these issues and expect people to appreciate quality food and drink consumption and production, without creating a cynical reaction. It all ties in with health and the wider environment too, which will end up in a virtuous circle if handled well.

On that note of health and sustainability on various levels of the production chain, it is crucial that people have trust in the source of food and be sure that it is low on or free from pesticides and Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) in food labelling.

Training and education also needs to support that shift in values. Are you going to spend the same amount of money on less but food of higher quality or on more and lower quality food? Current values promoted everywhere are to buy something ‘cheap’ because that is perceived to stretch your income. Similarly, are you going to spend the same amount of money on going to the pub with your friends or on a quality dinner?

It’s a matter of perception and that perception needs to change as well with education. The perception that quality food is associated with a social class notion, of ‘posh’ or unnecessary – eg, not buying factory bread from the supermarket is perceived as posh. This shouldn’t be the case when it is seen for what it is, a lack of nutritional value and taste, consequently a waste of money – which may sound harsh but logically true.

4. How would your life be better? What does being a Good Food Nation mean in your locality?
Comments
Overall better wellbeing, health and convenience! To start with, have easier access to staple food like bread as mentioned in comment 2 and to thriving fresh produce markets as per comment 11. If access to simple authentic staple food is not easy in Edinburgh it’s going to be a challenge in the Highlands, particularly the remote north-western areas. Having lived in Orkney, I understand that remote and underpopulated areas like the Highlands or the islands may face a challenge to meet the demand in numbers to justify investing in non-local quality food.

Also pride in the locality and its quality of life. Relief of being able to trust food sources all the way back to their place of growth and harvest or knowing whether sea produce has been tested for radioactivity. If such testing is currently taking place we are not hearing of it while the concern remains, especially after massive radioactive leakage into the oceans by Japan since 2011.

5. Are there any other essential steps we need to take before setting out on this journey?

Comments
As per comment 3, you need to plan for social, cultural and therefore also economic change. Have the right guidelines, monitoring rules and incentives in place to promote the desired activities and behaviours. In terms of shifting values and education/training, make sure ALL shops and commercial food outlets are on board. If necessary, their **entire staff need training in what fresh produce and quality food means** - as a baseline not as an option.

A key **social and cultural value of cleanliness** and hygiene is related to this: The connection between hygiene, health and quality/freshness of food as contributing to modern living standards and wellbeing, compared to times when medical research had not discovered this, needs to be driven home too, to disperse easy dismissal or cynicism. News of failed NHS hygiene inspections (was it Aberdeen hospitals?) only confirms this.

Let me share some of my anthropological observations across Scotland to illustrate. I have routinely witnessed **adults avoiding basic hygiene rituals** and practices, such as hand washing that should be common sense but it turns out they’re not (observed in public toilets in eg, museums and with flatmates, all this in Edinburgh). With such lax cleaning behaviour in the private domain, the same social behaviour happens in shops and eateries too. A lot of educated people lack awareness that their behaviour contributes to preserving food freshness/quality and preventing the spreading of bacteria, viruses, etc infections. I also heard first-hand accounts of a popular eatery where staff (in Glasgow) are not observing the rules on discarding use-by times for fresh fish etc, thinking customers will not notice. Somehow hygiene training or education needs to change to send a **more effective message**.
I experienced noticeable lack of fresh produce bordering on unhealthy in an 'award-winning' Thai food place in Inverness. When I pointed this out, the response was that no one had “ever mentioned” this to them, so the working assumption seemed to be they got away with it until now.

Therefore it seems at the level of restaurants, shops and all eateries serving food, that **stricter quality, hygiene controls and preventive inspections are required** to be put in place. Fishmongers and butchers may need to be inspected more often. Do raw produce shopkeepers need licences like liqueur licences?

6. How do you think a Food Commission could best help?

**Comments**

Not sure how broadly or narrowly you define the remit of a FC but perhaps a FC can deal with issues I’ve set out in comments 7 and 11.

I would guard against recruiting only food experts for the FC to include people with non-expert perspectives and thinking of the wider context beyond food and drink.

I might suggest sending the FC on an international food ‘safari expedition’ including Japan (examples below in c. 7) to set some expectations as to what the desired baseline on fresh and quality is to be in comparison to other food cultures. News reports (week of 18 Aug 2014) of an official delegation going to Tokyo for a seafood export promotion is encouraging.

7. In what areas should indicators be set to check we are on track towards our goals?

**Comments**

Look for opinions and views **expressed in public, ie the Internet**, in the wider region, they count and influence others. With the help of coding staff you could set up an **algorithm for detecting positive and negative critiques on food blogs and other Internet sources** – this should include the comments section which is often most revealing. Somehow the ‘bribing’ factor of in-kind payment or sponsorship would need to be factored into the equation in the case of a positive critique.

Listen to **foreign voices and residents that are widely travelled**, especially from known gastronomic regions such as the Mediterranean. Their food standards and expectations are going to be higher, so their critical voices are worth listening to. Having lived in Japan and sampled super-fresh produce due to very strict quality standards, I can offer that critical voice and experience.

Educate the commercial players eg **supermarkets**, to control the freshness of what they are selling. Just going to a Japanese supermarket is telling: several times a day (!) a quality control person goes around the fresh food
sections to label expiry times and discount the price accordingly, to make sure it doesn’t stay on the shelf. I’ve noted that most shops and supermarkets try to sell at full price until too close to the expiry date. This commercial behaviour would not be tolerated in a fresh food culture. I don’t buy and support this. (But the media report massive food waste, so something needs addressing here. Paradoxically, the same discipline of throwing away sell-by dated food doesn’t apply in hygiene.). On a values dimension, training on what hygiene means may be needed on a systematic basis for every shop worker not only owners but everyone who comes in touch with food and customers.

Go on a regular audit/surprise visits to sample from random shops and eateries, to assess their continued quality. Ask the general public to help, ask for feedback and complaints if an eatery was found to be sub-par.

The reporting in the media on quality controls considering various criteria, eg GM, levels of radioactivity, pesticides and more, would be reassuring to hear.

8. What are your views on the different approaches that could be taken to help us become a Good Food Nation?

On the dual issue of affordable and sustainable food, tax measures could be introduced to favour sustainable and organic farm produce with low/no VAT. At the moment these are penalised in the eyes of the consumer because they carry higher prices, eg Sainsbury’s organic SO brand. - In order to reverse this, lower VAT on sustainably and organically grown produce could encourage consumption and support sustainable farmers, compared with those who show little concern for the human and environmental health aspects.

Perhaps a wider legal competition framework needs to be worked out to stimulate the desired food agenda and encourage funding streams going in the desired direction of sustainable farmers and food outlets.

Another approach might be to link to scientific research evidence. You need to impact and change the definition and perception of ‘normal’ food in the long run. Using pesticides to grow food is considered normal but each year the amount of harmful treatment increases - yet the notion of normal food standards remains static, without measuring health impacts. So pesticide-treated foods are becoming increasingly more harmful without people realising, yet they are led to trust these normal food sources.

9. Do you agree with the proposed initial focus on:
   - Food in the public sector
   - A children’s food policy
   - Local food
   - Good food choices and
   - Continued economic growth?
Comments
Yes they sound good. I would add **Hygiene** from the start and not later in the process, as local attitudes towards cleanliness and hygiene are currently a problem. The right hygiene conditions need to be in place to maintain quality and freshness standards.

While keeping in mind my earlier recommendations for a holistic approach, education could be added to your agenda. This may be hard to implement, as parents need to be educated in the first place. While children are known to influence parents' buying habits, children ultimately don't do the shopping and cooking at home and are influenced by role models, at home, school, peers, video games.

10. Which other areas would you prioritise?

Comments
As mentioned before, cultural change from the ground up is key here, which in turn requires the right economic factors to be in place.

11. What other steps toward achieving a Good Food Nation would you recommend?

Comments
To create **public awareness** of issues and then promote trust in quality and affordable food sourcing, several factors could be tackled.

**Media buzz**: make a habit of regular media reporting on quality controls for various criteria, eg GM, radioactivity, pesticides etc. Currently, such reporting is rare. I last recall seeing a report of Newcastle council doing such food testing on random samples.

**Buzz from local food events & activities**: In addition to comments to question 7, perhaps work with the tourism industry here and abroad on creating food festivals – once enough diversity in affordable quality eateries exist to participate. Couple food events with other events, eg while the international festivals are on in Edinburgh – not only in Edinburgh but around the entire country to be more inclusive? Focus on different regional specialities, eg Orkney produce – where there are not many distinctly local speciality dishes (eg Orkney), create new ones! Launch competitions for chefs to create and submit original recipes, awards prizes, etc etc.

I've noticed some restaurants launching their own food events, via Meetup.com or Eventbrite. These kinds of tactics could be encouraged more routinely?

**More accessible and affordable markets**: Saturday open air markets are too expensive which is why lots of people don’t go to them. But markets are supposed to be affordable. In my experience abroad, market produce is fresh AND cheap because lots of foreign fruit and veg imports.
12. What else should be considered?

Comments
Perhaps making some economically/commercially tough decisions on whether to give space and exposure to fast food chains (there seem to be too many) or give that instead to food outlets that promote the quality and fresh food programme. - Something like urban planning for food shops.

In the drinks area, don’t forget loose leaf tea! Rather than buying tea bags, you could find ways to reward serving a proper brew. Since you are talking about quality food, this step in tea-drinking is part of that approach.

13. What steps do you plan to take to help Scotland on the journey toward becoming a Good Food Nation – in the next month and in the next 12 months?

Comments
No different behaviour from the usual. Have always been interested in fresh produce and food. I do my shopping accordingly even at the expense of convenience, ie no factory bread from the local Sainsbury’s, which means a walk all the way to the few fresh bakeries there are in Edinburgh and stock up.

I’m always on the lookout for the right quality-price value and for trustworthy food sources, eg organic or non-GMO. This means eating out is a problem because usually little is known about what the origin of the food served in restaurants and because of my lack of faith in food sourcing as owners and their staff are driven by profit rather than health or sustainability concerns.

I wouldn’t mind becoming more active in this area and contributing to the Good Food Nation programme, if you have a place for non-industry group members. Overall, I have lots of experience and good sense of sustainability, quality and value of food production and consumption.

14. How did you hear about this Discussion Document?

Comments
Via an Internet link – sorry forgot the precise source.

Responding to this Consultation Paper

We are inviting written responses to this consultation paper by 17th October 2014. Please send your response with the completed Respondent Information Form (see "Handling your Response" below) to:

goodfoodnation@scotland.gsi.gov.uk