CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

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

Comments: Scotland seems to be more renowned for its poor food quality than for its excellence, when seen from Europe or even England. It is vital that the situation improves; for health, enjoyment, environment. The idealistic photos on the front cover depict all of these, but are not usually the reality.

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

Comments: When that front cover becomes the norm. Success might show itself in the nature and quality of local restaurants, in the extent to which local fresh unprocessed food is sold in supermarkets, in the increase in farmers’ markets, in amounts of food grown by the public. A fuller assessment requires the appropriate indicators, which need themselves to be developed.

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

Comments: With this, yes: “people from every walk of life, will take pride and pleasure in the food served day by day in Scotland.” But not at all with the idea that exports encourage visitors. Growing food for the population of Scotland is a separate matter from exporting; indeed the two can come into conflict. “All players …..will be committed… “ is the right vision, as is the rest that that paragraph.

4. How would your life be better? What does being a Good Food Nation mean in your locality?

Comments: It happens that my family reside in the country outside Edinburgh with excellent soil, and grow most of our green needs, veg, fruit, eggs and flowers. And our diet is by choice low in meat. Improvements would be apparent when it becomes a pleasure to shop in the local supermarket or baker, instead of this being rather painful in the face of mountains of processed highly foods and mass-produced soft bread.

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

Comments: There needs ot be much more emphasis on quality and much less on markets. The case studies and then the story “taken together” do not represent quality but growth and markets. Market need to be home ones more than exports, and th ecological immpacts of the farming and fish
farming involved need to be incorporated. These deeper visions are needed before setting out. The opening of Section 5 indicates this.

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

Comments: A Food Commission can follow on from the Food Standards Agencies of England and Scotland to extend from minimal standards dealing mainly with safety to better quality dealing with more wide-ranging matters. The success stories of Section 5 can thereby be extended. A small but typical example is the FSA's frequent advice in the past that vitamin supplements are not needed if you eat a balanced diet. But in practice so many processed foods are "fortified" with extra vitamins that most people will take in supplementary vitamins with their breakfast cereals. The most absurd of these is Marmite, whose very existence is based on the rich vitamins of yeast, yet has supplements added. A Commission could take on core basic foods, like bread. Most of this at present is very poor, compared to almost any in mainland Europe. Most is made through the Chorleywood rapid process which does not give time for proper yeast digestion, and is unhealthy for sensitive people. The light fluffy product does not give anything to bite on. This is another example where lessons can be learnt from Europe. A Food Commission could also address the controversial questions about Genetically Modified Crops. After much research and literature search, I have become convinced, (as a former research biologist) that most GM crops are not needed and some at least are dangerously unhealthy. Scotland's present policy of being GM-free needs to be maintained. The educational scope for a Food Commission to promote resilient farming methods and towards a better food culture is enormous. All this shows that the Commission would need to address not only food but farming also. Included could be the needs for no-tillage farming, which is now being applied more and more, but mostly using herbicides to clear the ground pre-sowing. Some of these herbicides probably cause severe environmental and health problems, as indicated by recent findings.

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

Comments: Good indicators are very difficult to define. Since food and the means to obtain it are very much part of the culture of society, indicators of success must be wide ranging and holistic. It becomes part of the process of creating indicators of sustainability generally. All the indicators of health of a nation are needed here, as well as indicators of agricultural sustainability and its ecological impacts. However, there might be "canaries in the coal mine" type of indicator. The quality of bread could be one.

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

Comments: My comments above apply here. A Food Standards Agency has
been good and will continue to be so. A Food Commission is also needed, to create and agree high level indicators as stated, and then to follow these up to judge achievements. The two points made, to celebrate all that’s good and to counter the perception that all this is only for those who can afford it, are both vital points. Our own village in East Lothian is a prime example, where good fresh vegetables and organic foods are regarded as snob values, where obesity is visible high, and where dietary quality could rise and the food bill fall if people could learn how to cook better, and how not to waste food.

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 I agree that the first four are needed, but point out that high input farming, transport of the product, much processing and food waste, and an unhealthy population, all lead to economic growth as usually measured. Therefore I cannot agree with the last point. In addition as pointed out above, making increased exports a target is mistaken. Growth can be within the local market, a cycling of the economy, as perhaps suggested by the last item in this section.

10. Which other areas would you prioritise?

Comments The creation of local markets as major sources for peoples food. I would like to see “super Markets” in place of supermarkets. The old hunch that organic farming may be better for health and for the crops and land, is gaining ground scientifically, (in spite of some strong voices to the contrary). The efficiency of farming is still measured in terms of labour and land, yet it is increasingly inefficient in terms of fossil energy and quality of product. On these terms, higher efficience leadsto lower resilience. Higher employment and higher skills might reduce efficiency in these conventional indicators, but they could increase security, efficiency and productivity in terms of health and land. This aspect requires wider consultation and agreement.

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

Comments The steps to be taken need to have some force and probably finance to enable them to happen. Local efforts have often secured some funding, such as for the Fife Diet (which is not but should have been, mentioned in the document); and in funding from the Climate Challenge
Fund for a number of projects. Food and a food culture is part of our way of life, as indicated at the beginning of these replies, and funding needs to be organised to recognnise this.

12. What else should be considered?

Comments: Food production is now more and more dependant on scientific application. While this whole consultation points towards a change of culture, there also needs to be a corresponding change of culture of scientific application. This would stretch through agriculture, to land use, to medicine and health to peoples' well-being, in other words to human ecology.

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: Now: I have drafted a paper on my last comment above. I am co-promoting a better food culture in our local village. Next 12 months: I continue to be much engaged in agro-ecology conferences here and in Oxford and London. I am reviewing recent science about herbicides and GM crops and the relation between plant health and plant nutrition. I would be happy to contribute further in any follow-up.

14. How did you hear about this Discussion Document?

Comments: Through an email list concerning GM food.

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

Or by post to:
Good Food Nation
Food and Drink Division
B1 Spur
Saughton House
Edinburgh
EH11 3XD

If you have any queries please contact Eugenia Christie at 0131 244 9574.

This consultation, and all other Scottish Government consultation exercises, can be viewed online on the consultation web pages of the Scottish Government website at http://www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations.