CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

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

It is impossible to argue against becoming a Good Food Nation – it could be the essence of changing the health, wealth, productivity, dynamism of the Scottish Nation. As the document states, for a nation that can produce some of the best food in the world, our record on health is appalling and our eating habits are almost as bad.

Changes will not be easy to make as so much of our food knowledge and eating habits have evolved over the past 30 years or so and exclude a desire to know the source and make-up of our food. With the changes in social dynamics, as a nation we have become lazy, but worse, we have lost much of our knowledge of food production, choice, preparation and consumption of wholesome food.

We also have to recognise that many within our population do not want to spend their lives growing or even preparing their own food, viz the tarring, tiling, concreting over of many gardens in the urban areas. Life styles dictate that people want to spend their leisure time being entertained, not entertaining themselves by growing and cooking.

However, with good choices, good food and good health comes National and Civic Pride, which, until the referendum, had been lacking in our society. Hopefully now, and with this consultation, we can welcome a change in our Country’s eating habits.

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

We will recognise a healthier, more knowledgeable population, slimmer, and more able to make healthy choices. Expenditure on the Health Service will fall. We would recognise communities more focussed on helping each other and working together to achieve the benefits for all. Pride in Place will hopefully also avoid the awful litter problems we have from the consumption of “fast food”. However, we have to accept that this is perhaps an utopian vision which will be very hard to achieve!

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

I agree with the vision and cannot suggest improving it at this stage.

However, it has taken us the best part of two generations (possibly three) to
allow our standards of food knowledge/consumption to fall to the lows of recent years. It will not be an overnight “cure” and we must be patient and able to take the next few positive steps over the course of a few years and above all, not expect “instant” success. Knee-jerk reactions will do no good, nor will “top down” actions – this has to happen from individuals and communities, willing to embrace change. This is a course of action which will last many years, but I am sure, in the end, we will see a vibrant, fitter and healthier Nation.

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

My personal commitment is to buy and use locally produced food, from local suppliers with as little bought from multiples as possible. I would also attempt to waste as little food as possible. Within my locality, a Good Food Nation would simply mean, local food for local people, with the emphasis on seasonality, simplicity, short food distances and creating a population which recognises the quality of our Scottish/British produce. However, I have to remember that I come from one of the most productive areas in Scotland and not everyone has the access to the quality and quantity of local food that I have!

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

We have to establish where we are at the moment, using statistics from the health, education, food and rural sectors. We must also establish exactly what programmes and projects exist just now so that we do not re-invent wheels.

Already there are excellent examples of projects within schools and local communities of “growing”. One such was the “Wee green fingers” project within Angus Nursery Schools, which involved the pre-school pupils growing fruit and vegetable for themselves – one less obvious spin-off was that the children discovered the pleasures of playing/working outside.

Another project was working with design students from Duncan of Jordanston College of Art and Design, who, during their 2nd year, helped to create a board game which would help primary school children understand where their breakfast products originated. The Students had to interview primary school pupils to establish their knowledge of food production, but first had to assess their (the Students’) own knowledge, which involved visiting a local farm and learning, for themselves, what constituted good and healthy food. Many had to completely re-think their food consumption patterns!

There are also existing “food hubs” and co-operatives within deprived urban communities from which all of us can learn.
There are many other examples of good practice which are producing excellent results and which have ensured that today’s primary school age children, actually have a better knowledge of healthy, local food than their parents (but I will expand on this at a later stage in this document).

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

A Food Commission has to be able to be pro-active, with real teeth to stimulate, direct, encourage projects, communities and individuals towards better choices. However, it is important to encourage from “grass roots” rather than imposing from “top down”.

At the moment, the multiples dominate what is provided for consumers to purchase – they have a huge responsibility for the way we shop and the choices we make, and must be encouraged to take a greater responsibility towards the health and well-being of the nation. Unfortunately because they are answerable to share-holders their motives are solely for profit. They also are difficult to influence because they pay taxes to our Governments which obviously makes “penalising” them counter-productive for Governments!

However, we also have to recognise that multiples, including fast food outlets (if they choose to be) are the largest buyers of our nationally produced food.

The Westminster instigated “Food Adjudicator” is a relatively toothless body because it lacks the power to properly investigate the way the supermarkets and multiples treat their suppliers (processors and primary producers). Until some sort of responsibility is put onto multiples and supermarkets, there is little hope of changing much of the way we consume food.

The Food Commission therefore, has to be prepared to be controversial but persuasive, knowledgeable but willing to take on board that which exists already. Its membership must be made up from professions which influence the choices people make but also be prepared to include people who understand “grass roots” decisions. The size of the Commission recommended is ideal, but the choice of membership is crucial.

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

I do not feel I have enough knowledge to answer this question.

8. What are your views on the different approaches that could be taken to help us become a Good Food Nation?
I will give my views on this question within Question 9.

However, while reading the Consultation paper, I was aware that the word “farming” or “farmers” was hardly mentioned. It has to be remembered that Scottish farmers are the bulk producers of our food. Farmers feed the cities and whilst it is to everyone’s advantage that people are more aware of how to grow, cook and consume food in a responsible fashion, it is the farmers who feed the nation. In other countries (eg France, Italy and even USA) farmers are seen as people who contribute massively to the health and well-being of the population, however, in Scotland in particular, farmers and land managers are regarded with scepticism and distrust, including within Government circles. The proposals to alter the land ownership in Scotland could dramatically damage Scotland’s ability to produce enough food for itself (food security). Although community ownership of land and community involvement in land management decisions may seem fair and inclusive, it could have a hugely detrimental effect on the efficiency of production of much of the food raw materials of Scotland.

As mentioned in Q9, the “critical mass” within certain food production systems is almost at danger level in Scotland. We must attempt to redress this balance by encouraging more local food processing, such as local slaughterhouses, local cutting and packing businesses; otherwise we will simply be passing on to big business and other nations, the production our own 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?

Food in the Public Sector
This is crucial to helping Scottish (and British) food producers (primary and processing) in having the right “capacity” market in which to thrive. If public procurement is not targeted (with realistic targets) at our own food, the vital “critical mass” will not exist, viz beef production in Scotland needs not just a sound and stable suckler cow herd, but farmers specialising in finishers, along with local slaughter and processing facilities as well as local butcher shops to promote the choice, cooking and consumption of good Scottish beef. We have virtually lost that “critical mass” in the pigmeat sector in Scotland because so much of our pig production has to go many miles south to be slaughtered and cut up, before coming back up here to be sold.

We must avoid however, putting too much emphasis on ‘niche’ products like organic food – this is neither sustainable nor cost effective. The Scottish Government appears to be pushing producers towards Organic farming, but if we are all organic, the price differential will not support that system of farming. Organic production cannot produce enough food, in bulk, to
sustain any nation, which means the majority of farming must continue to be “conventional” or preferably termed “traditional”.

A children’s food policy
There are many examples of excellent work being done already for children within schools and through the Curriculum for Excellence. Obviously there is a huge learning curve for teachers as well as pupils, but we must guard against imposing too much on already hard pressed schools.

Primary schools in particular are already using the excellent resources provided by the Royal Highland Education Trust (RHET), the aim of which is to ensure that, within Europe, Scottish school children are the most aware of where their food grows and of the importance of the working countryside. Many examples exist already of the variety of projects undertaken by RHET, but its core work is to get school children, at best, onto a farm and at least, have a farmer speaker visit their school.

However, in the past, the majority of schools are no longer capable of cooking meals for their pupils. **School kitchens** have been lost in cost saving exercises. These need to be restored as a matter of urgency, so that the school kitchen and the excellent staff who work there, can be incorporated into the general learning (and the Curriculum for Excellence) of each and every primary school. There has been a divide between the perceived “function” of school meal staff and the teaching staff of schools whereas food and food preparation should be seen as part of the whole school community.

The Grounds for Learning scheme has an important part to play here as well, encouraging not only pupils, but young parents to be involved in care and maintenance of school growing spaces (whether that is raised veg/flower beds, old tractor tyres, or best of all, school gardens).

Local Food and Good Food Choices
Of course there has to be encouragement for everyone to at least attempt to grow a little of their own food, but as already stated, not everyone “gets a buzz” from doing that! We also have to look at the seasonality of Scottish/British produce, accept that there are limitations to economic production of certain products (strawberries at Christmas time is a perfect example). However, as those who have attempted to “eat Scottish” for a whole year have experienced, there is a huge choice of quality seasonal products available.

Shortened food chains are to be encouraged, with greater emphasis put on what is seasonal – spring lamb, garden peas and new potatoes! We need to learn again that different foodstuffs appear in the markets at specific times of the year. Root vegetables, cabbage, kale and broccoli in the winter are cheap and readily available Scottish products.

Continued economic growth
It is vital for Scotland to continue to support its export market, which will in turn improve its economy. However, I feel that we must get things right ‘at home’ too. It is pointless exporting our excellent products if our own population cannot get access to them, but much of our exports are
processed foods and these do not necessarily contribute to a healthy population.

By stimulating consumption of home produced, locally sourced foodstuffs, we will also be contributing to the economic growth of SMEs, which are a vital part of (particularly) the rural economy.

Farmers Markets are seen as a step in the right direction of local foods to local people, but these tend to aim at the more affluent consumer, who can not only afford to make choices about what they eat, but also have the time, knowledge and desire to make specific choices. There has to be another opportunity created for those who cannot make these types of choices, but until the major supermarkets are on board with improving the health of the nation, as opposed to making profit, this will be hard to achieve. As mentioned already, there are excellent examples of food hubs or food co-operatives which could be expanded to other areas.

10. Which other areas would you prioritise?

A target audience which is mentioned little in the Consultation document is that of young mothers. The 20 to 30 age group have less knowledge of where food comes from than their offspring. There is little point in educating children as to good food and diet if their parents (who buy the food) know even less! We must make young parents a top priority during pregnancy and also after their babies are born. Nursery schools can play a part in this by encouraging parents to become more involved with their children’s activities, but as mentioned before, this is going to be a difficult process, because of perceived ideas of modern lifestyle and choices.

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

I feel that we need ‘local animators’ or ‘food champions’ who can lead by example, within specific communities. Such things are happening already (ie Edinburgh’s Food Hub) but more of these need to be appearing in all communities. Perhaps these could be centred round school life, where parents can be encouraged to participate more in the ‘complete’ life of their children. As mentioned before, school kitchens could play a major role in this provided they are integrated more into the whole life of the school.

I also believe that whilst the Scottish Government is doing its best to encourage diversification on farms, it has to be remembered that we need volume of production to feed the nation on affordable food and that not every farm needs to diversify. On the east coast, farmers are already producing huge quantities of fresh field vegetables and soft fruit, and throughout Scotland we can produce almost all of the potatoes we need but much of these foodstuffs travel south to be processed. “Critical mass” and our own ability to process our foodstuffs has be a priority.
12. What else should be considered?

I think I have exhausted my ideas for the present!

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?

I will continue my work with RHET, bringing children (and their families, hopefully) into closer contact with food production and the working countryside.
I am also involved with the Scottish Food and Drink Federation as a ‘food ambassador’ to again take food production knowledge to the general public. Also through STEMNET Ambassadors (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) to encourage young people to consider careers in food production and processing.
I will also personally, be attempting to waste as little food as possible! And will attempt to encourage others to do the same!

14. How did you hear about this Discussion Document?

Through the press.

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.