No aspect of living is left untouched by food. All reference to food is to all attendant food activities including water, energy and land activities. These activities require a comprehensive education of what could be properly called the essentials of life – to repeat, food, energy and water. We can generalise and say that every country, region and locality needs farming, construction, engineering and manufacturing. In that order. Food, or farming, is the baseline for all forms of production that linked in a daisy-chain fashion would then go on to create the local, regional and national forms of the economy. Food signals the making of a Nation.

The aim of a Good Food Nation should be to put food first. Food connects. It would also follow from the opening paragraph, as is being argued, that it is only thanks to food that we can create communities, shape the economy and foster learning.

The importance of communities, the economy and learning is highlighted next.

**Community**

A community is one in which people gather, make decisions and share time and experiences. A community is often the single home set among a cluster of other homes – a street, cottages, households and neighbourhoods, a village. It is like placing each home/household at the centre of its home/household system. Each homestead at the centre of its homestead system.

**The Economy**

The particular type of economy as described is in fact a balanced economy. Excessive reliance on both the service and financial sectors have created an unstable economy. The role of a balanced economy, characterised by diversity and resilience, is to ensure that we are all summoned to play a key role. Human and physical resources combine to create a balanced and serviceable economy.

**Learning**

Learning, or a food education, can be best understood in relation to the food cycles. These cycles are the same as the water and energy cycles. In particular, a food cycle has a beginning (food is ‘born’, grows), middle (eating, recipes) and end (disposal, composting). Not the real end though, and composting says it all. Composting is to return to the soil what came from the soil. To return to the sea what came from the sea. What is being described here is the feedback loop or, simply, the food cycle. Food has undoubtedly a special quality. If we want to learn we need to learn and understand the food cycles first. We do that and concurrently set in motion all learning.

In summary, what would make a good food nation is its food production. Lacking this production creates several food-related problems downstream. These problems will be discussed next whilst providing an answer to the consultation questions that follow.
2. How would we know when we had got there? What would success look like?

It would be premature to talk about success. A National Food & Drink Policy may not necessarily give rise to a Good Food Nation. Currently there are many problems associated with food. According to the Wellcome Trust

Humanity faces profound questions about how our planet can sustain nine billion people by 2050. With the trend of urbanisation, the majority of the world’s population now lives in cities. There is a global nutrition crisis, with dual problems of under nutrition and obesity. Meanwhile, environmental and population changes have major implications for issues including food and nutrition security, access to clean water and sanitation, and natural disasters.

The problem with food is that we neglect food production. The good news however is that we have the answer to these ‘profound questions’, and this is a food culture and education. The link between food and education should not be lost, and this again in order to reiterate the argument in CQ1 (Consultation Question one). All talks about unresolved problems, ‘profound questions’ and formidable challenges are not going to go away.

Our governments, in this case the UK government, are responsible for this state of affairs. In the words of Sir John Beddington, former government chief scientific adviser:

We’ve got to actually face up to the fact that this [food security] is a complicated problem which involves vastly different levels of society and we need to be persuading policy makers not to think about food in isolation, not to think about climate change in isolation, not to think about water in isolation, not to think about energy in isolation. All of them are intimately related.

Seeing food separate from water and energy (and climate change) is at the root of many problems today. These problems are well documented and they are the same as yesterday’s. Not long ago, Lady Eve Balfour wrote,

The criteria for a sustainable agriculture can be summed up in one word – permanence, which means adopting techniques that maintain soil fertility indefinitely; that utilise, as far as possible, only renewable resources; that do not grossly pollute the environment, and that foster biological activity within the soil and throughout the cycles of all the involved food chains.

It is as if we had never entered the dawning of common sense. Soil health is human health. In particular, fertility is a sign of a resilient system. It is not a question of more or improved fertility; rather, as in any balancing act, we should ensure that we do not stress the fertility levels necessary for living. Biodiversity is the right answer to replacing the temporary loss of fertility, to scale (i.e. monocultures) and to a growing population. These are problems we experience today, as reported by the Wellcome Trust.

We cannot wish these problems away nor can we predict the future. The measure of success is the direction of travel.
A vision cannot be improved. Food grows, *unaided* (Herodotus) but there is still plenty for us to do to help that growth. A root problem would be to see food at the point of consumption only ignoring, as we have seen, production and composting. It begs the question, do we know when the need for food actually arises? This may sound like a silly question (not in the same league as the deep questions we are used to) but one nonetheless that has some merit. You might say, ‘the need for food arises when you are hungry’. Wrong. It would be wrong to place food at the point of consumption only (see isolation, isolation…). This is not an isolated case and, almost everywhere, the reference is on eating better, the 5-a-day promotions, healthy eating, the cuisines of the world, cream chicken risottos, and diets and waste streams.

‘Don’t Cook! Just Eat’ sums up our attitude to food – ask no questions. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) food is, ‘What is taken into the system to maintain life and growth, and to supply the waste of tissue;’. This too is wrong. Food is the produce of the soil but this is not reflected in the OED’s definition. The omission is significant.

For good food to become a reality we need a truly integrated approach involving ‘vastly different levels of society’. Health issues, the considerable amount of waste generated by industrial production, the threats to water supplies and the strain on energy resources – they all concur to make uncomfortable reading.

Industrial farming is highly water intensive. ‘It takes between 2,000 and 5,000 litres of water to grow one kilo of rice… For just a bag of rice… It takes 1,000 litres to grow a kilo of wheat, and 500 litres for a kilo of potatoes… It takes 11,000 litres to grow the feed for enough cow to make a quarter-pound hamburger…’ (Fred Pearce) 70% of all fresh water is used for irrigation. A case of water down the drain!

We use 150 litres of fresh water a day. Of this, a third is flushed down the loo. This however does not take into account the water content that goes into producing the food (say 30%) and goods (say 65%) we import (also known as virtual water). If we did, we would see our effective daily water consumption soaring to a staggering height of three thousand (3,000) litres per person/day (Defra). This had led Gavin Neath, Senior Vice President at Unilever, to say, ‘For far too long, businesses like ours have been effectively shipping water around the globe.’ Two things happen when we do not produce, we become wasteful and we nick water and resources from other countries.

We could go one better and say that alongside good food we also need good water and good energy. What a good nation that would be! A good food policy on its own is bound to fail the proposed integrated approach test.

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

It is not what the Good Food Nation would mean to me and my locality but what I and my locality could do for the Good Food Nation. The initiative requires the participation of all local ‘locals’. We should see any locality at the centre of a network of many other human habitats. Production is to be coordinated. Assisting
this coordination is the institution of decentralised learning centres at local and therefore regional and national level.

These learning centres already exist and go under the names of households, villages or towns. We need to be judicious and accept that we cannot feed hungry cities. A food policy should focus on the smallest of social groups – i.e. the family or household group and, by extension, the workplace too. This is a unit of measure more manageable than, say, ‘humanity’ or even ‘locality’. For households read the family group and any other combination of occupiers ranging from an elderly person or couple with or without young relatives to tenants or people cohabiting. Good food means good health, good nutrition and good environment, too. Realising this would clearly be a major step forward. At all times, it would take people to help that food grow, take people to harvest water and people again to generate energy, and generate goodwill. People to grow. People to harvest. People to generate. The health and wellbeing of nations (and ‘good’ nations at that) depend on that carrying capacity of the soil, i.e. its fertility.

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

The steps to take before setting out are the same as those you would have to take journeying through it all. It is a continuum and we could summarise the points raised so far by saying that it is important to both localise food production and localise food learning. This would probably come closer to the true spirit and letter of a Good Food Nation. Resources are always physical and human resources. Yes, there would be essential steps (‘starting’ with food would be such a revolutionary undertaking in itself!) but if you apply the feedback loop principle (see CG1) you would come to realise that the movement is circular rather than linear. There is nothing new in this circular movement but it must be said.

We are spoilt for choice and with so much to do, fix and start anew, we could actually kick-start a Value Resources initiative or programme. A suitable, upbeat motto for such programme would be – care of the environment embodies an environment that cares.

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

It is always important to state what is good for a nation but we live in the real world of differing and opposing viewpoints. The role of a Food Commission is to reconcile these opposing viewpoints and lead from the front. Unfortunately, we still pull in different directions.

The unresolved problems of hunger, severe malnutrition and obesity have barely been mentioned. The state and the Food & Drink industry have shown they are unable to solve these problems. Related to these are other ‘security’ problems we have to contend with. What we need is institutions (call them Food Commission or otherwise) that are governed by a set of rules, guidelines and principles that are just and consensual. This is not difficult but what is important to highlight is that the spirit of this set of rules etc should imbue the concept of nation.
Two guiding principles are covered here.

- **All peoples have the same basic food requirements.** Our primary need is to satisfy our needs. Food is wellbeing, culture and traditions. Produce it, and benefits will accrue. Natural diversity will take hold. A knowledge of plants, soil and water will develop. A bond will cement people with their surroundings.

And so is the second of the Guiding Principles:

- **All households have the same basic energy requirements.** This should already put us in the right frame of mind to look around for the right energy mix – solar, wind, tidal, ground heat, hydro, biomass. To single out ground heat, the ground is at any given time warmer or cooler than the air above it, thus allowing for heat exchange.

Food and shelter converge and we could properly talk of one basic need. The real key point here is this - the guidance these principles offer may be sufficient to instruct and tell us how to satisfy the stated requirements. There is a role here for a Food Commission and civil society to provide this guidance.

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

In an ideal world, we can identify the interests of the family group with those of society, the community or the state. The fortunes of one with the fortunes of the other. This ideal world is the starting point for social and political inquiry.

The family group is a social group, one amongst many and no doubt the most important one. Its interests and fortunes coincide with those of the nation. As in a well functioning organism the parts are as important as the whole. Food, therefore, should inform the triple social, economic and educational function of the household or family group. The first indicator, to use the term shown in the question, is to establish a clear link between the family group and the Food Commission. The idea is that of a two-way traffic and hot line. Instructions and guidelines are fine but we can all tell the same story by appealing to local growers, displaying food stalls and celebrating our achievements. We could make it the norm and make it visible. Lest we forget, food is the produce of the soil. If not produce of the soil, then do not call it food. We call it food because of, implicitly, the necessary or necessitating properties attributed to it. Is this food for thought, food for the soul or is it our daily bread? All of them.

Indicators are important and it may be useful to indicate a few more. For instance, we know that food is what nourishes us. Yes, but what right kind of food would that be? So we need food that is fresh, seasonal and rich in nutrients, proteins and trace elements. The idea is not to be prescriptive (no desire to be so) but on the other hand this is neither an optional extra. Rather this is something for every day… well, let us say for every meal. Our body and guts command it, our skin and cells require it, and our bones and muscles too demand it. It is in this particular sense then that a good indicator is provided by the general well-being of people.
8. What are your views on the different approaches that could be taken to help us become a Good Food Nation?

A number of different approaches have already been shown. It is clear that we need to inspire one another. Mucking in, a visit to the ‘working’ countryside and a shared meal can be very inspirational. A trip abroad often shows the great variety of foods available there. There is also something very innovative and playful about food. Publications and illustrations abound but one particular illustration springs to mind.

Written by Peter A Please, the publication centres on a gardening project shown as a core project whence seven other projects or subjects radiate like spokes of a wheel. Each subject is a ‘branch’ of knowledge with many offshoots. Can one be proficient in all branches? Can we afford not to? Can we all be or aspire to be a Leonardo da Vinci?
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?

The initial focus should be on the family group and expand it from there. The public sector and any children’s food policy will prove ultimately to be a false start. Food is educational and convivial and we should get into that frame of mind. A further reference to ‘Gardening Project’ shows that the publication is ‘a month by month guide advancing educational gardening activities in schools.’ Starting out with September, it says,

Creating a SENSORY CURRICULUM is the groundwork for healthy, cognitive development. Try these ideas: tearing, breaking, snapping – lettuce, pea pods; peeling – carrots, potatoes; grating – lemon, carrot; cracking – nuts; smelling – everything, especially contrasts, eg roses and rotting cabbage; stirring and pouring – peat, sand and water; sifting – sand and soil; tasting – for contrast, eg lemon and honey, turnip and apple; listening – for different sounds, bird-songs, noises in the open, wind blowing, children laughing; touching – (nearly) everything.

And through to August and thus completing the twelve month cycle, it says, “Ending Hunger Starts at Home”. “It is not just learning about food growing, but also encompasses maths, environmental science, geography, science, organic principles. (Ruth Hirsch)”. There is plenty for family groups and schools to do. As we have seen, there is a role here for the workplace as well. There are no ifs and buts with food, and there is no pussyfooting about either. It is a simple as that – food is the fons et origo of all knowledge, of culture and tradition, trade, ecology and science.

The issue of a ‘continued economic growth’ is contentious. The more we expand in this particular fashion the greater the trail of suffering we leave behind. What is suggested here is that we should allow for an equal distribution of food production commensurate to the distribution of people.

10. Which other areas would you prioritise?

The family group, the local, the regional and the national should be permeable institutions. There is no suggestion that we will meet all our food and other needs individually. No family group is an island, and the satisfaction of human needs is a joint effort as most things are. We should prioritise and encourage the development of common synergies.

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

Said Professor Brian Cox, “I’ve heard it saying that we don’t truly understand biology until we understand water”. Biology or the science of life. This is what is
meant by a food culture and education. We need to study plants, water, gases, animals, bacteria, spores, fungi, living organisms, rocks and minerals etc. We learn that Charles Darwin was amazed to see how soil cast up by earthworms had buried ashes and lime that had been spread several years before. ‘He went home and began a series of earthworm experiments that would go for the next 40 years.’ That we would call dedication.

For once, we could really say that there is no limit to learning. Food is unique. The continuous food cycles act like a sure and unfailing reinforcement of our actions, a corrective guidance to our learning and an indication of our rightful or wrongful ways of doing things. Language and our modes of expression will flourish in this environment. We should rejoice at the opportunities for learning. They are all around us if we care to look. Radially.

12. What else should be considered?

The learning curve. Everything is a process and the result or product of this. As we learn we also develop new strategies. What we need to consider is 1) the fixed and unchanging food baseline, and 2) the moving parts of the clunky wheel of life.

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?

A bit of competition is good but staying the course is even better.

14. How did you hear about this Discussion Document?

BBC I suppose or maybe just Google.

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:

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