CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

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

We fully support the Scottish Government’s desire to create a nation where ‘it is second nature to serve, sell and eat fresh, healthy, food’. We welcome the Cabinet Secretary’s observation of the paradox that in spite of the fact that Scotland produces some of the highest quality natural produce, we continue to have one of the poorest diet-related health records in the world. We have highlighted this paradox for many years. We applaud the success of Scotland’s food industry and wish to continue to be a part to its success through innovation, but we believe that other aspects of Scotland’s food culture must now receive focused and sustained attention if we are to improve the health of Scotland’s people and enable the entire food sector to fully realise its potential. The strategy is essential if we are to break the traditional view of Scotland as a country where we have an unhealthy diet. However in setting this ambitious vision Scottish Government must recognise that contemporary society often creates conflicting priorities which make it difficult for individuals, and hence families and communities to engage with food in the way this consultation proposes.

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

Feedback from tourists and VisitScotland should identify ‘food’ as one of the main reasons tourists visit Scotland and the days of being noted for products such as deep-fried mars bars would be long gone. Consumers would understand much better the role of food in their lives and that of their families and they would be better motivated to think about the nutritional value, provenance and quality of the food they consume both in and out of the home.

This attitude would feed into how supermarkets and retail and food service outlets display and offer food products, with health and provenance as a priority.

Public sector catering should be a flagship of best practice.

Health indicators associated with improved diet would start to show some improvement (e.g. reduction in levels of obesity, lower incidence of type 2 diabetes, reduction in cardiovascular disease and diet-related cancers.

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

The vision is ambitious. It is difficult to see how it could be improved as a vision. The strategic requirements, such as joined-up and partnership working, and clear milestones and indicators of success, are clearly described in the document. However, there needs to be more clarity about
what is good food – some of the examples of success in the document relate to foods that do not necessarily meet all of the criteria for good food – although they may be better than some others. Some clarity is needed about whether 'good' is a relative or absolute concept. Above all, there needs to be more innovative and creative thinking if the initiatives associated with this vision are to succeed where others have failed.

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

Those who have the income to exercise choice over their food may be encouraged by this initiative to make healthier choices. For those who are less well-off, access to good quality food, combined with the relevant knowledge to put healthy food choices into action would be a good outcome. Seeing food retailers and food service businesses make a step change in how they present and price healthier options, and how they make them available for all, would be a good outcome.

More specifically, we plan to hold a workshop before the end of the year at the University with relevant interested groups such as Campus Services, relevant academics, KE and Policy Officers to explore what further steps it can take towards the ambitions outlined in this document.

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

Scottish Government needs to gather the best evidence from across Europe on behaviour change and food choice, and also best examples of interventions/policy changes that show some success. But we need to be sure of what it is we are trying to achieve and how we'll know if we get there. This means that there needs to be a robust evaluation strategy in place that includes short-, medium- and long-term outcomes. Evaluation should be an integral part of the planning stage of the programme, allowing enough time and resources for baseline data to be collected before it is implemented.

The failure of the Scottish Diet Action Plan was that targets were set, but those who needed to be involved were not engaged in any plan to make the vision a reality. See also 7.

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

There are multiple stakeholders who need to be involved in a number of initiatives to achieve the vision set out in the document. The Food Commission could facilitate the right conversations to make this happen. Stakeholders need to meet in a way that enables them to think outside their corporate agendas and work creatively towards the vision and goals in this
There need to be clear routes for action from the Food Commission, so that new ideas and insights can be implemented at the right levels, with appropriate resources and commitment and in a coherent way.

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

Relevant short-term outcomes are important to feed back into the policy cycle to give an indication of whether the policy is heading in the intended direction. Concept mapping is one technique for designing an evaluation that can be used for complex programmes where there are multiple interacting elements. It helps design the evaluation, identify short-, medium- and long-term outcomes and estimate the time required to detect a change in the outcomes. See http://www.knowledgescotland.org/briefings.php?id=128

The most important indicators are those relating to poor diet – foods high in sugar fat or salt. At the individual level data collection has focussed too much on fruit and veg with a lack of data on other aspects of diet. Modest improvements in fruit and vegetable consumption do not seem to be associated with improved health outcomes.

But there also needs to be a focus on food outside the home. There could be with some sort of quality mark for restaurants and cafes, in the same way that FSAS assesses the food hygiene in restaurants. There should be incentives to encourage the industry to engage with these initiatives.

There should be a development of more quality-assured regional branding of goods so customers can buy in confidence that products are local and high quality.

Feedback from tourists and VisitScotland should identify ‘food’ as one of the main reasons to visit Scotland (in the same way that other cities in Europe are recognised as a centre of excellence for its culinary experience).

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

More attention needs to be given to the potential changes that can be made at a macro level: e.g. reduction in sugar / fat content through collaboration or regulation; restricting the promotion of unhealthy foods especially to children; volume discounts on unhealthy foods; consistent labelling approach and to the barriers that exist for some individuals – not only cost of food but cost of energy for cooking, time, cooking skills, cooking equipment.

The way we live our lives makes having the time to eat properly difficult for many people. We lead (in many cases) such asynchronous lives as
families, with working patterns changing so much in recent years in line with flexible working and employment, with increasing numbers of us on zero hours contracts which makes ‘just in time call ups’ for work a common occurrence. This precarious and uncertain way of life means that it is becoming much harder to have the time to plan, prepare and sit down to eat with others (considered the healthier way to eat).

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?

A focus on improving the quality of food offerings in the public sector is a key issue, especially in schools. Qualitative research carried out by Rowett Institute researchers with secondary school pupils indicates that this would match their expectations and desires to eat tasty, appealing and healthy food.

Food policy needs to be joined up – focussing on children without considering the families and the communities in which they live may reduce the effectiveness of interventions. Consideration also needs to be given to recognising the potential for conflict between economic growth and a healthier diet and how this should be resolved, not least because there is a need to reduce the average calorie intake.

10. Which other areas would you prioritise?

If the people of Scotland are going to change their ‘deep-seated attitudes to food which lead to poor habits …’ the opportunity and motivational environment must be there to support any desire to change. The workplace environment is somewhere that can ‘make or break’ a desire to change food habits and Scottish Government should continue to support and research new initiatives and ideas for promoting the ‘Good Food Nation’ vision in the workplace.

Food outside the home – takeaways / cafes / restaurants – is a growing sector and voluntary measures have so far done little to improve the information available / portion sizes / healthy choices. This sector is also important in economic terms and in the image of food presented to visitors to Scotland.

11. What other steps toward achieving a Good Food Nation would you recommend?
There have to be some clear role models for people to follow. Public figures must be seen to practice what they preach. It also has to be demonstrable that being part of the Good Food Nation is not just for the better off, but is achievable at all levels of society. There needs to be an exploration of models of balancing incentives with disincentives.

12. What else should be considered?

There are a large number of ideas and initiatives taking place across different regions of Scotland. It will be important to build-in evaluation to these initiatives and to share best practice. One size will not fit all and we need to consider different solutions for different groups and communities. The current state of initiatives in different regions is unclear. The type of local initiative being discussed include:

1) Supermarkets could have a dedicated ‘Local and seasonal’ area, promoting local food producers, and celebrating the very best of Scottish produce. This is done very well in some outlets in France. Also applicable to food service sector.

2) We could also have local authority-sponsored ‘Regional Produce’ outlets in main tourist areas, with cafes serving the produce. Again the French model comes to mind.

3) A food map could highlight the whole range of food (tourism) opportunities in an area, so that all involved realise that they benefit from the collective action.

4) Restaurants and Cafes – the quality of food provision is very variable outside the main cities. There need to be incentives to encourage a better quality provision and also to improve the service and knowledge of the front of house staff.

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?

The Rowett Institute University of Aberdeen, through the research and Knowledge Exchange programme for the ‘Healthy, Safe Diets’ theme of the Scottish Government’s Strategic Research Programme, will support ‘Good Food Nation’ by supporting policy teams with workshops examining the best evidence available from the research base.

We will engage with food industry initiatives such as Food and Health Innovation Centre and continue our relationship with Scotland Food and Drink. Our research provides underpinning knowledge and expertise that can help the food industry to develop new and healthier products for both home consumption and export.

We engage with a public/community audience through a number of different activities, e.g. at cultural, food and science festivals, with a range of activities to promote the understanding of nutrition and health. For 2015, the
University’s Spring cultural festival, The May Festival, will have a strong food and drink strand, celebrating the Year of Food and Drink.

The University already has a Sustainable Food Statement and action plan, and we intend to hold a workshop before the end of the year to explore what actions we can take to move further towards the aspirations set out in this consultation.

14. How did you hear about this Discussion Document?

Through close links with Scottish Government policy teams.

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.

The Scottish Government has an email alert system for consultations, http://register.scotland.gov.uk. This system allows stakeholder individuals and organisations to register and receive a weekly email containing details of all new consultations (including web links). It complements, but in no way replaces Scottish Government distribution lists, and is designed to allow stakeholders to keep up to date with all Scottish Government consultation activity, and therefore be alerted at the earliest opportunity to those of most interest. We would encourage you to register.

Handling your response

We need to know how you wish your response to be handled and, in particular, whether you are happy for your response to be made public. Please complete and return the Respondent Information Form which forms part of the consultation