CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

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

There is a paradox between the food that Scotland can produce (high quality) and what it consumes. The need to address Scotland’s reputation as a country of poor diet and associated poor health is long overdue. Having respect for food, in terms of how it is produced, understanding the relationship between what we eat and our health, is part of becoming a Good Food Nation. So the aim is laudable and essential if we are to break the traditional view of Scotland as a country where people have an unhealthy diet. Scotland’s food and drink is associated with the high quality environment in which crops are grown and livestock reared, and where processing and manufacturing takes place. We need to ensure that Scotland’s natural capital is protected and restored to continue to supply the resources needed to meet the vision.

Being a Good Food Nation involves taking a holistic view from primary production to consumption. The former strategy focused upon the whole supply chain – to good success. Yet this strategy appears to focus on the link between food and public health. The rest of the supply chain hardly gets a mention. Does this mean that the food and drink industry is doing alright and can now be left to its own devices?

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

A clear approach and sound evaluation methods need to be put in place for evaluating the ‘grand aspirations’ (i.e. a ‘Good Food Nation’) combined with realistic timescales to meet the aspirations. Scotland would no longer be ridiculed for the being the land of the deep-fried Mars bar and of pie and chips. Customers would be more educated about the importance of food, diet and health in their own and their family’s lives, and not see food as simply fuel, but understand the importance of nutritional quality. This change of attitude would feed into how supermarkets, retail outlets, and food shops display and offer food products with health and nutrition as a priority. Scotland would be seen as a place that not only produces good food, but also consumes and understands what good food is. Health statistics associated with improved diet would start to show improvement (e.g. reduction is the rate of obesity and lower incidence in type diabetes, reduction in incidence in CVD and diet-related cancers). Our food and drink are produced in a way that does not impact adversely on the environment and ideally protects and/or restores the ecosystems that have been damaged by past agricultural and fisheries practices. There is a strong emphasis on social/health policy in the new strategy and it is less clear where innovation is going to play its part in the strategy. There is a need to include a focus on innovation, research and development for food economy and sustainability.
3. Do you agree with the proposed vision? How would you improve it?

The vision is highly ambitious, which demands compliance from a diverse number of different players – food industry, schools, public sector providers, public health sector. The pressures and demands on them are different and sometimes conflicting. It is difficult not to agree with the direction of travel for the vision, but it must be questioned whether it is realistic. The Scottish diet action plan failed to dent Scotland’s poor diet and health record, so unless the plan to deliver the vision matches the aspiration it is not likely to succeed. In some areas it has to be questioned whether Scotland has the capacity to increase exports and satisfy national/local demand (e.g. fish and sustainability). Overall, the vision is probably expecting too much all at once, and a phased and prioritised approach is required.

More specifically, the proposed areas of focus are, in principle, fine and they are consistent with the ‘Recipe for Success’ policy document. This is because, overall, the document is still focused on improving the sustainability of the food system through the growth of the food and drink sector, improving consumers’ food choices and increasing the contribution of food at a local and regional level. The main challenge is not necessarily the specific priority areas considered in the document but how to integrate them in a way that all the objectives pursued by each area are satisfied. For instance, the ‘growth’ and ‘local food’ areas might be in conflict with the ‘health’ area if growth in the food and drink industry (and maybe local food) is led by the production of food high in sugar, fats or salt. As mentioned above, the focus of the document is on improving the sustainability of the food system and therefore the priorities should be allocated to pursue those goals. As it is in the document there is some degree of repetition in terms of food choice and growth. Children’s food policy is a sub-area of good food choices as parents have plenty to say about children’s food choice. As regards growth, local food is part of the food sector and should be a sub-area (regional or local growth) of economic growth. Food in the public sector is not a goal per se; it is a measure to incentivise economic growth, to promote local food and to promote food choice. It would be useful to have a ‘working definition’ of what is meant by the terms: ‘so we can move towards a healthier, resilient and sustainable food system’, and a shared understanding of how we assess or measure them. For example, is animal welfare included under sustainability; what level of animal welfare are we referring to (minimum standards or above); and how do we assess welfare for this purpose? Further, we need to consider what we do about imported animal products and how we apply the same standards of health, resilience and sustainability to these.

What is not made clear is the relationship between his strategy and the new Scotland Food Body (ex Food Standards Agency Scotland) and also the link to the Scottish Food Commission.

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

For many, who have the income to exercise choice over their food, the Good Food Nation, may encourage them to make healthier choices. For
those who are less well off, then fair access for all to good quality food, combined with knowledge and opportunity to put health food choice into practice, would be a good outcome. Food retailers and outlets would take pride in offering healthier options and make them available. Food and drink will be grown, processed and manufactured in ways that protects and enhances Scotland’s natural heritage. A Good Food Nation will minimise waste at every stage – from primary production through elimination of constraints such as disease and poor nutrition/soils, through harvesting and processing by optimizing processes, to food manufacture through innovation, and eventually to distribution and consumption, through knowledge and changed behaviours.

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

It is important that we define and measure the importance of local food in the food and drink sector. There is currently a lack of information about this. Research indicates that the local food sector is heterogeneous in terms of products. It is important that we define more clearly what areas will be supported (see also our comments provided in Question 3). All the main players need to buy into the vision and understand what they are being asked to do. There have to be realistic targets set and evaluation against these along the way. The failure of the Scottish diet action plan was that targets were set, but those who needed to be involved were either not engaged or were blissfully unaware of the targets. If there are targets then a route to getting to these has to be agreed. Also, we have to identify what we think might reasonably work, rather than leaving it to hope. Ensure that the deployment of the CAP support for sustainable production of food and drink. We should ask what is being done elsewhere that works and then try and learn from that. A more meaningful consultation with the research, agriculture and food and drink sectors is needed.

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

It needs to act to coordinate and oversee activities in the different sectors that can contribute to a successful outcome. Part of this will be about facilitating the conversations between the different stakeholders who have a contribution to play in a Good Food Nation, but who may have quite different agendas and priorities. There are benefits from a joined up approach to food production and the downstream stages of the supply chain (i.e. farm to plate, etc.) but more clarity is required with regard to its role, remit and responsibilities. For example, is it advisory, or does it have more powers than that? What relationship will the Commission have with other initiatives and with RESAS. Could the Commission act as a link between RESAS and other parts of the Scottish Government which are often removed from the outputs of the RESAS programme? Commission members chosen should include researchers, but there should also be representation from farmers/primary producers. This should be more than just a marketing exercise for Scottish food, so a ‘bottom-up’ as well as a ‘celebratory top-down’ approach is needed. It is important that the Food
Commission takes a broad view of the issues and be oriented to evidence-based decision-making procedures.

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

The indicators should be associated with all the priority areas. There should be a baseline, and periodic indicators should be produced and contrasted against the baseline. It should be noted that some indicators for monitoring food consumption are already in place. In some instances, we need to better define what we mean by the key targets (e.g. health, resilience, sustainability) and then appropriate indicators are needed to assess these. Techniques such as concept mapping can be used to identify what might be expected to change, particularly as early indices. There need to be indices that include outcomes (e.g. food related health, wellbeing, economy, exports, environment), outputs (e.g. food, jobs, businesses), inputs (e.g. energy, labour, land), and context (e.g. farms). This is a piece of work that needs to be commissioned. Assessment of sustainable production of crops and livestock including soil health, water quality and biodiversity also needs to be included.

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

No comments provided.

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?

As mentioned above, the focus of the document is on improving the sustainability of the food system and therefore the priorities should be allocated to pursue those goals. (See also our comments provided in Question 3). As noted in Question 7, further clarity is required about some of the key targets in the document, in terms of health, resilience and sustainability.

Local food is a niche area and less likely to have impact on the broader population than public sector and the service industry. This does not make it valuable, but it is more likely that actions in other areas are likely to provide greater levels of success.

10. Which other areas would you prioritise?

Restaurants and food outlets; workplaces; public procurement.

The document has little to say about the notion of benchmarking e.g. benchmarking food choices across different socioeconomic groups to better understand food poverty. More information about the proposed use of
economic instruments would be helpful, such as fat/sugar taxes in terms of dietary choice. It may also be appropriate to focus more strongly on dealing with trade-offs, which are implicit in the concept of sustainability.

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

Joined up thinking and action. Recognition that there is no single solution. We should try to emphasise the need to work with primary producers and farmers to build a food strategy from the bottom up as well (i.e. taking a whole supply chain approach). The document is rather top down with farmers only mentioned once despite the discussion about sustainable production. Agriculture and horticulture are not mentioned at all in the document, but it would be useful to consider the concept of ‘Sustainable Supply Chains’ which can be subdivided into ‘sustainable production’ and ‘sustainable consumption’ which are both pertinent in this context. It is interesting that food safety is not mentioned in the document; the Commission is not aspiring to be a food standards agency. However, food safety is part of the RESAS Research Programme and our research in this area remains highly relevant.

12. What else should be considered?

Research by the MRPs provides underpinning research and understanding that can help the food industry develop new and innovative products and the ability to explore the ambitions set out from both the perspectives of both production and consumption. Harnessing this research will help Scottish food producers and processors (from farmers to retailers) contribute new and healthier products for both home and international (export) consumption.

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 MRPs will be engaged in a wide variety of knowledge exchange events as part of their RESAS supported research over the course of the next year. This will be aimed at increasing the understanding of the potential of their research to impact on food production, practice, and quality, as well as changing peoples’ behavior and attitudes towards food and food choice.

14. How did you hear about this Discussion Document?

No comments provided.

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 questionnaire attached an annex as this will ensure that we treat your response appropriately. If you ask for your response not to be published we will regard it as confidential, and we will treat it accordingly.

All respondents should be aware that the Scottish Government is subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 and would therefore have to consider any request made to it under the Act for information relating to responses made to this consultation.

Where respondents have given permission for their response to be made public and after we have checked that they contain no potentially defamatory material, responses will be made available to the public in the Scottish Government Library (see the attached Respondent Information Form). These will be made available to the public in the Scottish Government Library by (date to be confirmed). You can make arrangements to view responses by contacting the Scottish Government Library on 0131 244 4556.

Responses can be copied and sent to you, but a charge may be made for this service.
**What happens next?**
Following the closing date, all responses will be analysed and considered in shaping the direction of Scotland’s Food Policy.