CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

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

It is essential that we actually become a Good Food Nation. **Aiming** to become a Good Food Nation is important and a good place to start.

It is important to become a Good Food Nation because nourishment is at the heart of human survival and our capacity both individually and collectively to participate and to succeed in our endeavours. Our ability to work, our economy and society, intellectual life, happiness, relationships with others and social stability will all crumble without the availability of good quality and healthy food for all. Society is not sustainable without good food. The availability of healthy food is also a human rights issue therefore all barriers to people obtaining healthy food, regardless of their background and income, must be dismantled. A lack of education or learning and understanding about good food is one of these barriers. Allotments and also community gardens have a very important role to play for all generations because these places provide opportunities to learn about good food. They also provide places for people to engage in healthy social and physical activity.

The discussion document proposes a vision for 2025. A child who is three years today will be fourteen by then and much of this child’s key physical and mental developmental milestones will have passed. If that child has not received healthy food during the period then he/she will not only have a shorter lifespan but that lifespan will have fewer life chances than others who have been well nourished. We should therefore aspire to realise the vision a little bit faster for that child’s sake and for our sake overall as a society able to compete in the world economy. Children within families that have an allotment have a better opportunity to eat fresh healthy vegetables and a greater opportunity to be healthy. Allotments providing fresh healthy food and locating allotments in SIMD areas have the capacity to change established geographic patterns of ill health.

Currently we are a Good Food Nation already, in pockets. There are areas where good food is served, eaten, grown and enjoyed. This isn’t only in well-heeled areas where residents amble down to the farmers market on a Sunday after a cappuccino and the paper in a well know coffee house. For example allotments and community gardens currently exist in the poorest areas providing healthy food, albeit not necessarily through traditional consumers. With regard to allotments in particular people of all ages and backgrounds are industriously producing the healthiest, freshest and most nutritious food, often by organic methods and mostly unsupervised. Whilst doing so they are improving their physical health and skills in the process. It is very important that we recognised, value, disseminate and apply these great examples of good food being created more widely. Let us multiply the number of allotments across the country and set aside funding to do this. It is important to support more allotments, especially in areas of multiple deprivations.
2. How would we know when we had got there? What would success look like?

Success should be measured. We cannot declare success or improvements without clear benchmarks and also clear criteria to evaluate progress. This is the way to eliminate spin.

There should be no single measure of success; instead success should be measured against several criteria to include social, health, environmental and resilience criteria. It would be appropriate to develop these criteria in consultation with grassroots community organisations, the voluntary sector and grow your own groups and allotments as well as more easily identified powerful and articulate groups within the food sector. Academics and those with scientific and social scientific expertise should be seconded to help.

There must be a clear strategy to ensure that those who define what success ‘looks like’ are are drawn from as wide and inclusive a pool as possible and greater efforts should be made to ensure success is defined in terms of overall value rather than a straightjacket of purely economic criteria. It needs to be recognised that indirect contributions can be made to our economic health through a variety of good food initiatives.

The Good Food Nation consultation, is dealing with such a fundamental and long-term right that it must not be developed in isolation from other consultations and legislation. Integration with other visions and missions is key to both its success and its credibility. For example the inclusive spirit and intention of the Community Empowerment Bill should be apparent within this consultation and some cross-linking with land reform should take place. Success in achieving a Good Food Nation requires both the empowerment and inclusion of people at the grassroots in decisions about food and more active and genuine efforts to make land available in the long term to grow food.

Success as a Good Food Nation cannot be measured at any one snapshot in time; it must be measured in terms of sustaining and permanent changes and this will require changes in how we currently do things. For example, the use of stalled spaces to grow food is an important and useful induction to the idea of growing good food within an urban environment and must be commended. Ultimately however permanent sites to grow food, such as allotments are needed otherwise dissatisfaction and discontent will result. Success will be a permanently changed landscape.

The emphasis within the discussion document on the value of good food to our economy and as a contribution to exports is important however a greater emphasis is needed on achieving social, health, and resilience
gains through good food. There is a kind of obscenity around the idea of exporting the best quality luxury food alongside the existence of food banks. Let us reach a more comfortable position where we can export food and generate income without having to conveniently ‘forget’ about our resident un-nourished. To be successful there is a need to be brave and direct and to develop appropriate indicators that avoid ‘fudging’ the issues around food equality. It will be necessary to increase funding for research to arrive at reliable indicators and to track long-term trends.

In addition to comprising representatives of all sections of society the Food Commission that is proposed should also include a few people who have the connections, knowledge and ability to work with University level researchers to develop appropriate indicators of success and to examine population and health statistics. A longitudinal approach will be required.

Success will also be evident when we have created true resilience in our food system. Success in this direction will be appreciating and supporting a mixture of approaches and ways of producing, distributing and creating good food. Support for allotments and community gardens as well as for traditional producers, farmers and food businesses will be needed. We must also consider and create new and different ways of organising the production of food and support people who have the creativity to design new ways to organise food production and new forms of social relations around producing food. We cannot predict the future therefore the best form of resilience is to ensure true variability in our approaches and to encourage and foster approaches to rowing food which are that little bit different from traditional farming. Allotments are an example. One clear aspect of success will be achieving the situation where all people who wish to are able to grow good food near their home on an allotment. This will contribute towards a greater understanding of food and eliminating the disconnectedness between food and its methods of production. Allotments are also truly sustainable because once these are set up no further support or members of staff are required. Allotmenteers manage and organise themselves to produce food and learning takes place naturally through social relations on site. To provide land for an allotment for one in every hundred people only requires an area of land equivalent to the size of Holyrood Park.

If all you grow is potatoes in a field and blight strikes then you will go hungry. If you grow potatoes, beans and pumpkins in a field and blight strikes you still have pumpkins and beans to eat. The key to resilience in food is diversity and variety. Allotments are a good example of people growing a variety of crops together. Allotments are also an example of producing good food where individual love and attention is deployed. Pests and diseases are spotted and action is taken quickly.

Success in becoming a Good Food Nation will also require a great many professional bodies to buy into the vision and the sponsorship and encouragement of an interdisciplinary approach to food issues. For example planners, architects and local government should all be aware of the needs to create growing and food production spaces and be actively pursuing and supporting this.
The emphasis in the vision on schoolchildren is good however success in becoming a Good Food nation should be evaluated across all ages and sections of the community.

It is accepted that growing your own food creates a better understanding of good food. There must be routes for people who wish to grow their own food to develop and increase this activity and their skills. For example people may start with a small garden and move from this to growing in a community garden and then on to an allotment. Horticultural enterprises, skills and qualifications in food growing and employment in market gardens or other food growing may follow for some. These routes and opportunities must be clarified, consolidated, supported and also marketed to young people and others.

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

The mention in the vision of ‘all players’ in Scottish life being committed to serving good food is rather vague. The word ‘players’ is a poor choice. It indirectly implies those with power to participate, or take part in the game and the game is for real, it is not a gamble. The term stakeholder should be used instead. This recognises that even those without power or capacity at the moment have a stake and are affected.

Allotments are an important way of democratising participation in food production and also, at the same time, building a more resilient food production system. Anyone can have an allotment and the only barrier is the availability of land and the capacity to obtain land through negotiations with landowners and local authorities. It is hoped the community empowerment bill will improve the situation however further support may be required in some areas. The vision would be improved by providing funds and support to develop a clear, informative and understandable guide for ordinary people who wish to obtain land for growing food and manage it effectively. This should include information on fit for purpose organisational structures, health and safety, constitutions and other practical issues.

The food and drink sector should be defined more broadly to include the third sector and food banks as well as voluntary aspects of food production.

Public procurement of quality local and healthy food is a good and valued goal however there are many other creative ways in which the public sector can support a good food nation beyond solely procurement. Success would be opening out and exploring this further to see what types of initiatives may develop. There are many cases of hospitals and other public bodies making spare land and grounds available to grow food and allotments and more of this should be encouraged. The expertise that resides in local authorities and public sector organisations was developed and paid for by the public purse. This should be more accessible to community and small grassroots organisations to help them develop projects and aspirations in relation to good food. Secondments and other ways of facilitating capacity building around good food is needed. Something simple like a dietician or a planner or even a public health official being seconded on an occasional Friday
afternoon to help a small community organisation frame their application for a grant or a request to participate in a meeting about possible land use are all ways that could help. Cultural change within organisations and people may be required.

Further sharing of ideas and expertise across sectors would be beneficial. For example organic farmers participating in sharing their knowledge with local community gardens and allotment growers.

Our food culture needs to be more experimental. The enthusiasm currently directed towards eating and experiencing innovative world food needs to be challenged and directed towards more creative ways of using home grown food for sustainability and waste avoidance. There are many opportunities that could be created and exploited if more support and funding were available to encourage people from different ethnic backgrounds to share their knowledge about growing and eating different types of foods.

The vision needs to address and nutritional poverty more directly head on. An opportunity for children to learn about food is valid but the vision needs to also place an emphasis on other members of the community and adults. This is a more difficult and challenging issue to address because of ingrained habits with adults and the fact there is less of a locus and fixed place to access adults.

The vision needs to protect different ways of producing food and growing it. In order to protect something it must be recognised and recognition depends on it being defined. As well as being forward looking the vision must recognise and protect those aspects of our food system that have been successful such as allotments which is growing on 250 square metres, the size required to feed a family.

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

The Scottish allotments and Gardens Society represents allotments and plot holders across Scotland and also has regional and local federations and forums of allotments. This organisational structure means that SAGS has a local, regional and national perspective.

For each of the localities we represent a Good Food Nation means each locality having sufficient allotments space to satisfy demand to grow good food. It would also mean allotments within reasonable walking distance. Unfortunately in many local authority areas there aren’t sufficient allotments to meet demand and furthermore where land exists in some urban areas there is contamination. Being a Good Food Nation in ‘our’ geographic localities and for our community of interest more generally means funding set aside for remediation, more land available for allotments and sufficient land to provide a typical plot size of 250 square metres for those that can make best use of it.
The crofting connections project reaching schools and educating about the role of food in shaping their heritage is an excellent example of promoting a Good Food nation. This approach should be extended into urban areas to develop an appropriate link between heritage and food there. Allotments are a key part of this and should be supported.

Serious and real threats to global food security means that more people must develop skills in food production and this will affect every locality. Being a Good food nation in my locality and in Scotland means a willingness to recognise areas of land and gap sites that are appropriate for food production and a willingness of local authorities to be open to using and earmarking sites for this purpose. We must increase understanding and our knowledge of what grows best in lots of different areas and situations and what foods we can effectively grow in each area and soil type. The resilience of the food system will be increased where there is local food actually being produced locally by local people on site.

Avoiding food waste is important but we need to be able to increase opportunities to recycle and use food waste constructively and allow the distillates and products of food recycling to be more easily accessible for people to use. There is a great opportunity to do this with allotments. Research, marketing and also sponsoring on the ground examples of recycling food waste and biodynamics must be encouraged and supported.

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

A long hard look at the members of the proposed Food Commission is required. These people should comprise representatives of the main food sectors but also grassroots and voluntary organisations and allotments. Health and environmental sustainability experts should also be included.

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

A food commission could be a vehicle for people to have their views and needs on food, the food industry and food production to be represented at the heart of policy making in a way that is exciting and has not been available before. A food commission should represent people and not solely the food industry. Another body promoting trade and local producers alone is not enough to realise the holistic goal of the Good Food Nation and would be a squandered opportunity.

A Food Commission should be able to commission short pieces of key research and also influence funding provision.

7. In what areas should indicators be set to check we are on track towards our goals?
See above – health, education, social, economic, sustainability, participation, resilience and land provision for allotments, community gardens, small scale food growing and creative use of public land.

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

The approaches suggested in the document are good however there is a need to strengthen and support food growing and allotments. The emphasis in the document is firmly on people as consumers of food rather than as producers themselves. Sponsoring and promoting allotments will facilitate a sense of ownership and greater understanding of food. The child who has grown up with an allotment in the family has a different relationship to food than one who hasn’t. That child is more likely to appreciate and eat good quality 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?

   Not completely. There needs to be people being encouraged to grow their own food as one of the priorities. Growing food for you and your family and friends is the most ‘local’ expression of local that can possibly be achieved. Where an allotment is within walking distance this eliminates the need for transport, packaging, distribution, marketing or any other process between the food grown and the person who eats it. The Grow Your Own Working Group’s recommendations should also be referred to and incorporated.

10. Which other areas would you prioritise?

   More local food growing by way of allotments and also community gardens. Opportunities for all people of all ages and backgrounds to learn about good food and growing food. There is a distinction between learning and formal certificated education, which should be recognised in order to ensure that learning about food and growing is accessible to all.

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

   Significant efforts and incentives to develop a healthy and rich food culture should be taken. Increasingly people on allotments are growing a variety of fruit and vegetables, which encourages a rich food culture. Ethnic groups are growing across Scotland and people from a variety of ethnic groups are taking on allotments and sharing their knowledge about different growing techniques and different types of vegetables and fruit. Experimentation in
growing food and growing different types of food is going on. All of this contributes to developing a rich and interesting food culture and expanding our knowledge of foods we can grow and our resilience and food security. All of this contributes to enthusiasm about food.

12. What else should be considered?

More allotments. Food waste is a recognised issue with a variety of waste aware and love food hate waste campaigns being funded. People who grow their own food on allotments, due to the effort and understanding involved, rarely waste food. Tackling food waste could be greatly improved by providing more opportunities for people to grow their own food.

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 Scottish allotments and gardens Society plan to continue lobbying for recognition and support for allotments. We are a voluntary organisation with members donating considerable amounts of time and effort to promote the value of growing good food. We have an annual conference and every year we promote growing food on allotments and disseminate skills on food growing and good practice examples. This year we will run a workshop on the Good Food Nation and raise awareness through presentations and our newsletter. Local Forums and Federations are also engaged in disseminating information. An example is the project Glasgow Grows the World. We are working within the Grow Your Own Working Group to host a conference with Housing and Health Boards to disseminate good practice. Working with other organisations such as the Federation of City Farms and Gardens, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Central Scotland Green Network we have produced a Guide to Growing on Contaminated Land, which will be launched at the Community Food and Health Conference in Glasgow this October. The Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society has a long history of promoting and supporting people growing good food.

14. How did you hear about this Discussion Document?

We check the Scottish Government’s current consultations regularly but we also hear about consultations through our networks.

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