CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

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

- Both Soil Association Scotland and the Fife Diet work to encourage and enable healthy and sustainable food provision and positive food choices in Scotland.

- The Fife School Food Project is a collaboration between Fife Council (Catering team), the Fife Diet and Soil Association Scotland (specifically the Food for Life Scotland team).

- Work on this innovative project – and a recent mid-term evaluation - has provided a good evidence base which is informing the joint response of Soil Association Scotland and the Fife Diet to this consultation.

- We would like to note that both Soil Association Scotland and the Fife Diet have also contributed a separate response to this consultation. This response is therefore focussed principally on the role of public sector food – specifically school meals - within a Good Food Nation and the structural or policy changes that might be needed to support this.

- We both agree that becoming a Good Food Nation is imperative and fully support and endorse ambition in this regard.

Background:

- The Fife School Food Project was launched in October 2013 to test the feasibility and benefits of providing local, freshly prepared and sustainable school meals across a primary school cluster. The model chosen to support implementation and provide a framework for achieving change was the Soil Association’s gold Food for Life Catering Mark (FFLCM). (This pilot was in addition to Fife Council rolling out the bronze FFLCM to it’s139 primary schools and 11 nurseries).

- Within the gold pilot the three partners collaborated to:
- Identify and work with new producers/suppliers to develop a truly local and organic supply chain into the selected schools.
- ‘reverse engineer’ school dinner menus; using locally available produce to develop new menus which met the gold FFLCM award.
- Prepare and disseminate communications materials and activities to inform teachers, parents and children about the values and principles behind the menus and information on local suppliers.
- Train catering staff in participating schools about:
  - Ordering from new suppliers
  - Preparing and serving new meals
  - Engaging with pupils
  - The FFLCM standards and sustainability in general

- Five primary schools and one nursery school in the Leven area of Fife were selected as the focus for the pilot. They were supplied with a range of fresh and mostly organic produce (including fruit, vegetables, meat, dairy and eggs) from producers/suppliers based within a 50 mile radius of Leven

- A mid-term evaluation of this pilot was commissioned by the Fife Diet and conducted by an independent consultant with the report: Fife Local School Meals Pilot: Case Study Report, A report for the Fife Diet, Charlotte Lee-Wolf, 2014) available in full here [http://www.fifediet.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Fife-Local-School-Meals-Pilot-Case-study-report-FINAL.pdf]

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

- We believe that success will come when people of all ages and from all walks of life have the opportunity to eat good food and choose and/or are encouraged and enabled to do so.

- Good food means fresh, minimally processed and sustainable produce which is healthy, seasonal and produced using environmentally sustainable systems e.g. fish which is Marine Stewardship Council certified, food and drink which is Organic certified, or from lower input farming. It is also GM free. Such food, especially if produced in Scotland or nearby, will support the nation’s economy, health and wellbeing, a thriving food industry (with high levels of employment in the sector) and environmental sustainability. It is therefore good for people, places and the planet and will bring
significant community benefits.

- We know from our experience implementing the Fife School Food Project and a subsequent, independent report on the work that “the pilot has considerably improved the sustainability of meals served in participating schools” and the report concludes “it is possible to design and implement a sustainable food procurement policy in schools, based on locally produced, fresh ingredients.” (Fife Local School Meals Pilot: Case Study Report, A report for the Fife Diet, Charlotte Lee-Wolf, 2014)

- The report outlines how:

  “… in the first few months since this unique project was established, it has made progress against a range of outcomes that benefit the local food economy even on a small scale. The pilot has created new market opportunities for several local producers/suppliers and, in doing so, it has increased their capacity to supply the public sector in future. The pilot has also provided additional employment opportunities within two local businesses and it has provided greater security for participating businesses with the provision of long-term contracts and prompt payment terms.

  The initiative has produced a range of other early benefits. In particular it has increased capacity of the Local Authority, school catering staff and other partner organisations to design and deliver sustainable food procurement policies. It has also made significant improvements to the sustainability of school meals served in participating schools - thereby increasing access to sustainable food choices. Additionally, the pilot has enhanced the job satisfaction of school catering staff who have been responsible for delivering the pilot at school level.”(Ibid.)

- Some of the specific benefits of significant changes to school food have been shown to include:
  - Big improvements in the level of enjoyment and pride school cooks feel when producing school meals from scratch.
  - [Cooks have] utilised existing skills to prepare pilot meals that they have not an opportunity to apply for many years (thus contributing to greater job satisfaction).
  - Additional employment opportunities within participating businesses
  - Greater certainty in relation to demand for their product, cash flow, and the diversity of their customer base
- Increased access to more sustainable school meals (Ibid.)

- However, our experience delivering the pilot project identified and a number of barriers and challenges and we have found it is particularly difficult to sustain or expand such good practice in the face of continuing economic pressures and ongoing efficiency savings across Local Authorities.

- As the report makes clear, "several key ingredients are required" for success:

  - On-going investment to (a) build capacity and infrastructure in local supply chains and (b) undertake an programme of communications and engagement in schools and the wider community;
  - Continued strategic support from the Local Authority to champion the initiative and draw linkages between the approach and sustainability benefits for the food system and other key policy areas;
  - Sustained partnership working between the Local Authority and other relevant organisations, drawing on a broad range of resources, to overcome challenges associated with provision of local school meals;
  - Strong communications and engagement between cooks, local producers/suppliers and pilot partners to ensure lessons are captured and embedded as the project continues to develop;
  - Time to allow new food behaviours to become fully embedded within everyday life at participating schools. (Ibid.)

- Better access to affordable, healthy, sustainable and local food within the public sector will benefit the people of Scotland with improved health and wellbeing across society, declining levels of obesity and weight-related health issues. This positive change will clearly be greater if all sectors play their part, which will likely require further policy drivers.

- Communities can become more resilient and strengthened economically by having greater local food provision from nearby farms, suppliers and retailers, with a greater proportion of jobs available within the food and drink sector.
3. Do you agree with the proposed vision? How would you improve it?

We agree broadly with the proposed vision but would suggest the following:

- The vision should include reference to farming (and food production) as the first link in our food system.

- The document should lead with a vision for how it will impact and benefit people and communities and not with an economic emphasis on exports.

- There needs to be more emphasis on the grassroots and community led local food movement as well as a vision for how our towns and cities across Scotland will be transformed by moving food production closer to our communities and involving everyone directly in our food system.

- Changing this line “All players in Scottish life – from schools to hospitals, retailers, restaurants and food manufacturers – will be committed to serving such food” to…“All players in Scottish life – from our food producers, suppliers and manufacturers, to places that serve food such as nurseries, schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, care homes, retailers, cafés and restaurants, staff canteens and all other food providers in Scotland – will procure and provide increasingly sustainable, healthy and local food and be supported to do so through clear national and local policies and related activities.”

- It is not enough to suggest that it’s good enough that everyone ‘knows what constitutes good food and why’ and the vision should instead reflect the importance of people being supported, encouraged and enabled to make positive food choices. Being a true Good Food Nation will require engaged citizens who feel empowered to participate and indeed are the driving force for positive change.

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

- It means farming in ways which have a positive effect on our communities and biodiversity; increased wildlife, improving and conserving soil structures and minimising environmental impact.

- It means the consistent provision of nutritious and sustainable food in nurseries and schools and the education and engagement of service
users (pupils and employees), their families and the wider community to enable and inspire them to eat well.

- It means a positive food culture – celebrating good food and where mealtimes are an important and valued part of the day where everyone comes together to share and enjoy good food and where conversations about the provenance and seasonality of ingredients are everyday topics.

- It means achieving the bronze Food for Life Catering Mark across approximately 145 schools and nurseries. This means serving school meals which use:
  - freshly prepared food using unprocessed ingredients
  - no undesirable food additives, hydrogenated fats or GM ingredients
  - meat from farms which satisfy UK farm assurance standards
  - eggs from cage free hens
  - seasonal produce
  - do not contain any endangered fish

- It means improving the sustainability attributes of school meals as exemplified in the Fife School Meals pilot which achieved the gold Food for Life Catering Mark and the following attributes:
  - Certified organic produce: baseline 0% and Pilot: 66% of spend
  - Free range produce: baseline 0% and Pilot 4.3% spend (eggs & chicken)
  - MSC certified fish: baseline unknown but 1 product and pilot 1% of spend (2 products)
  - Freedom Food certified produce: baseline 0% and pilot 2% spend
  - Fresh seasonal Scottish produce: baseline unknown and pilot 70.2%

- It means re-localising supply chains with increased local employment opportunities and business security for SME’s/farmers and producers. The report into the Fife pilot noted these as two early benefits of the pilot in the short time it has been in operation.

- It means ensuring a skilled and motivated workforce. For school caterers:
  - the mid-term evaluation reported “big improvements in the level of enjoyment and pride school cooks feel when producing school meals”

- And for local producers: several said the experience has enhanced
their ability to secure new contracts in the private sector, because it demonstrates reliability (associated with the year-long contract) and their capacity to accommodate the requirements of a large customer (i.e. a local authority); others explained that the experience gained means they are better placed to pursue other public sector contracts if and when they arise.

- It also means trialling a ‘whole school approach to transform food culture:
  - All 5 gold pilot schools and a nursery will trial the Food for Life Scotland’s Education and Engagement Framework in order to develop a best practice model for delivering a whole school approach which links culture, catering, curriculum and community.

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

- The journey has already begun. Pockets of excellence can be found across Fife (and indeed Scotland) from community gardens to local, fresh, healthy and sustainable and organic food on the public plate and it’s very important these achievements are celebrated and recognised as contributing to the work on becoming a Good Food Nation.

- However procurement systems need to ensure that sourcing healthy, sustainable and local food is easy and we should build on the work of ‘Catering for Change: Buying Food Sustainably in the Public Sector (2011).

- Preventative spend (Christie Review) needs to be prioritised to reframe ‘best value’ towards local and sustainable food where possible in recognition of the significant social and economic returns on the investment made.

- Exploring ways to improve the financial viability of school food catering – ring fencing of budgets on food spend? - allowing for investment in better quality food, more skilled staff and more modern equipment whilst allowing room for innovation in menu development.

- Ensuring a balance within school food provision between providing food that children want to eat and providing food that we as a society agree our children should be eating and educating them sufficiently for them to accept and enjoy that food when it is on offer. The Fife
School Food Project has clearly identified that changing the food on the plate is not enough – it must be accompanied by effective communication to ensure children (and their families) understand and eat what is being served.

- Considering whether in a ‘Good Food Nation’ it is in our nation’s best interests for most secondary school pupils to remain permitted to leave school grounds at lunchtime with little or no restriction on the types of food served to them nearby; undermining the impact of Local Authorities’ attempts to improve the health and sustainability of their schools’ food.

- Engaging parents and pupils across Scotland so they understand the benefits to health, environment and economy of eating healthy and sustainable school meals and encouraging and enabling them to do so through a whole school approach to food.

- Ensuring effective engagement and a joint working relationship between catering and education teams at local authority level and at school level.

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

- A Food Commission could help take a high level overview of the food system and ensure that all activity across public health, food and drink, environment and across the public, private and third sector is joined up and consistent.

- Membership is key and we hope the Food Commission would actively engage with, listen to, and act on input from, practitioners on the ground delivering and supporting front line services as well as all aspects of the supply chain. It is vital the group does not operate as an expert group ‘behind closed doors’.

- Local groups and relevant organisations, including all partners on the Fife School Food Project, should be invited to submit information to the Food Commission, either in writing or face-to-face, based on our learning and the information we have gathered about the challenges we face when trying to implement procurement and catering systems in the public sector that are healthy, sustainable and better for Scotland’s economy.
• Recommendations from the Food Commission should be heard at the highest levels of government across health, education, procurement and food and drink.

• The Food Commission should report publicly on a regular basis against clear targets.

• By using this knowledge to implement policies and to address and remove policy and operational conflicts that will make a positive difference, and challenge structures that restrict progress.

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

• We would like to see the role of sustainable and healthy food properly built into the National Performance Framework (NPF).

• It is also vital that the existing Scottish Government policies around all aspects of food (often split across different departments/divisions) are joined up and we hope the indicators set would share targets with, and link to, all relevant policies and actions plans across health and nutrition, public sector, environment, people and society, education and economy.

• In addition we suggest the following areas should be included in a list of indicators:
  - Public sector procurement targets relating to the uptake of the Food for Life Catering Mark and sustainable supply chains/products
  - Health and wellbeing
  - Nutrition
  - Environmental impact (water pollution, soil quality, land use, GHG and emissions reducing over time, levels of biodiversity, area of organically certified land, volume of certified sustainable seafood, and reduced waste throughout the supply chain.
  - Skills and lifelong learning
  - Employability: number of people working in food production and foodservice and earning the living wage

8. What are your views on the different approaches that could be taken to help us become a Good Food Nation?
• Investment in skills throughout the food system (farming, production, retail, food-service, consumer skills) to encourage and support an economy and society more geared towards wholesome and unprocessed food production and consumption.

• New entrants to farming should be encouraged with access to support, training and access to land, with an emphasis on support for small scale production for a local market.

• Scottish producers and farmers need to be supported to develop reliable and resilient supply chain infrastructure as well as reliable – and viable – markets for their produce.

• Scottish food service and retailers need to know there is public demand for Scottish produce and be persuaded / required to work more closely with Scottish producers within procurement law.

• Using evidenced based models like the Soil Association’s Food for Life Scotland (FFLS) programme to transform food culture in a site, setting and across a geographical area by promoting the uptake of: the Food for Life Catering Mark, the FFLS Education and Engagement Framework and the Sustainable Food Cities Model.

• To encourage and support innovative and collaborative partnerships to deliver positive change e.g the partnership between Fife Council’s Catering team, the Fife Diet and Soil Association Scotland.

• Ring fencing budgets for ‘good’ food provision and staffing (cooks) within the public sector.

• Scottish communities need to be encouraged and enabled to make positive food choices which favour affordable healthy, sustainable produce over and above convenience food.

• The local food movement in all its guises needs increased support.

• Scottish high streets need to be regenerated, so they are places that support, rather than act against, good food provision.

• Scottish families need the knowledge and skills to understand both why it is important and also how to cook fresh, healthy food for adults and children alike.

• The Scottish public sector needs the resources and procurement guidance to enable the purchase of Scottish, sustainable produce
Even where the upfront cost is greater.

- Investment is needed to ensure local supply chains have the infrastructure required to service their local area. For example, loans for on-farm storage and/or packing equipment which would allow more farmers to directly supply caterers, community co-ops and peoples’ homes.

- We need to have a stronger food culture which celebrates the sharing and social aspect of good 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?

- We agree with the first priority but think it needs to be linked to food production and intersect with policies and support towards sustainable production and supply chains.

- We believe that ‘A Children's food policy’ should be widened to become a ‘A Food Policy for Children, Families and Communities’, acknowledging the importance of improving our children’s diet, but strengthening its potential for change by including the wider contexts in which our children grow up.

- ‘Local food’ should expand its emphasis to supporting new and existing small local producers with skills and access to land and it needs to recognise that local food is not always the most environmentally sustainable option and therefore reference should be made to ‘local and environmentally sustainable’ as being the ideal.

- We believe Good Food Choices should better reflect the importance that people are encouraged and enabled to make good food choices. After all, people cannot choose good food without the money to buy it, access to it or the equipment and knowledge/skills to cook it and suggest it is re-worded to ‘Encouraging and Enabling Good Food Choices’.

- We further believe that “continued economic growth” should be changed to: “Sustainable development - aligning social,
environmental and economic growth” in recognition of the fact that some kinds of economic growth are not compatible with sustainability. Care for the environment should form an important part of at least one of the priorities and this is where we believe it fits best.

10. Which other areas would you prioritise?

N/A

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

- Evidence from the Fife Local School Meals Pilot demonstrated it was viable – and proved successful in improving sustainability attributes - to ‘reverse engineer’ a school lunches by designing a menu based on the availability of local and seasonal produce. We think this should become the norm within the constraints of current procurement law as it was demonstrated to deliver a number of early benefits including business security for participating SME’s, additional employment opportunities, high sustainability attributes in the food and increased pride and job satisfaction from the cooks.

- In addition to the work already underway in Fife, Edinburgh and Glasgow in developing a more localised food system we recommend building and consolidating the partnership work already started by the Fife Diet, the Food for Life Scotland and Nourish team by developing a number of place based ‘exemplars’ in cities or Local Authorities who already demonstrating considerable leadership through the Food for Life approach. These exemplars could be supported to become beacons of good practice where a strategic and grassroots approach works concurrently to drive real and positive change to our food culture and food systems.

12. What else should be considered?

N/A

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 Fife School Food Pilot Project has already “considerably improved the sustainability of meals served in participating schools” according to independent evaluation and work is now underway in a phase 2 to trial the Food for Life Scotland Education and Engagement Framework in the participating cluster schools in order
to strengthen culture, catering, curriculum and community in a whole schools approach. The impact of this work on schools and the wider community will be monitored over the next ten months.

- The catering side of the pilot will shortly be reviewed to determine which elements should be retained and/or changed over the next 12 months. It is clear that the pressure on budgets and ongoing efficiencies facing Fife Council is likely to be a critical factor as to whether it will remain possible to use predominantly local and organic food in Fife’s schools.

- Notwithstanding, all Fife primary schools currently have the bronze Food for Life Catering Mark which means meals are independently certified as being freshly prepared, healthy and seasonal and good for people, places and planet.

- Fife Diet are currently piloting the Fife Food Co-op, trialling brand new software from Open Food Network, which aims to make it easy to buy directly from a wide range of Fife-based producers. This technology could also potentially solve many sourcing issues for Local Authority procurement. We are planning a meeting for other groups who wish to use this software in January and are looking into possible ways to develop this project so that it meets even more of the procurement and distribution issues highlighted in the report.

14. How did you hear about this Discussion Document?

Via Soil Association Scotland.