Crofting Connections is delighted to have this opportunity to respond to the consultation on Becoming a Good Food Nation and offers this response in support of other submissions from Soil Association Scotland, in order to highlight the role of crofting in schools and communities. This written submission is accompanied by a short film Food from the Croft (password Beremeal) made during a gathering of young people in Assynt of secondary school pupils from S2 to S5 from Kinlochbervie High and Mallaig High in Highland and the Nicolson Institute in the Isle of Lewis. The two locations were both part of community-owned estates - Glencanisp Lodge, owned by the Assynt Foundation, and a croft that is part of the Assynt Crofters Trust.

Crofting Connections is an innovative educational project which will enable young people, aged 3-18 and living in rural communities across the Highlands and Islands, to learn about crofting past, present and future. The project is delivered by Soil Association Scotland and funded by HIE, the Scottish Government, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Heritage Lottery Fund and Scottish Natural Heritage. Crofting Connections is currently working with 135 schools throughout the crofting counties.

The traditional crofting principles of providing food, housing, clothing, energy and culture are very much aligned with the 21st century desire for sustainability and offer tremendous opportunity for food education outdoor learning and place-based education.

The project is firmly aligned with Curriculum for Excellence and creates a natural link to sustainable living and working in places where people and the environment are valued and nurtured. It is also providing valuable professional development opportunities for teachers.

Things have moved on in crofting since the stakeholder discussions of 2007 organised by the Committee of Enquiry into Crofting led by Professor Martin Shucksmith, but the perception in the quote below still remains in some areas: ‘at the moment crofting is seen as old men and sheep and is not attractive to youngsters, who could be attracted by other aspects such as the environment and diverse business opportunities able to be run from crofts.’

Martin Shucksmith: Committee of Inquiry on Crofting Final report 2008

Another crofter said: ‘In 1886 people needed the land, now the land needs people’ (Lewis stakeholder discussion)

The task of Crofting Connections is to introduce crofting into the school curriculum in order to encourage young people to be part of forward-looking crofting communities in which food production plays a key role.

1 http://vimeo.com/109017156
CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

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

Good food in Scotland has a world-wide reputation for excellence, but this does not reflect the regional imbalances of food access in communities in both rural and urban areas. Really good, nutritious food, produced from sustainable systems, with an emphasis on provenance and quality, is not freely available to large sections of our nation. Even in rural and maritime areas where quality food is produced, it often bypasses the local population on its way to national and international markets, as part of the global food system.

**Becoming a Good Food Nation** will mean that much more good food is produced and stays close to home and is enjoyed by people throughout Scotland.

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

We will know we have got there when people throughout Scotland have access to good food, as the norm, and when young people aspire to being part of a thriving food sector of which they can feel proud.

Urban and rural communities will have the support to produce local food on an appropriate scale for the local food market, saving food miles, reducing food waste, eliminating food poverty, respecting rather than changing the landscape, safeguarding soil fertility and nurturing the culture of Scotland’s diverse regions. Everyone will have a right to access local food which is good for human health, the environment, animal welfare and the local economy.

In all schools, at all levels from nursery to upper secondary, food education will be given a high profile across the curriculum. Existing funding to the very successful food education programmes will be increased and the partnerships between the programmes maintained and strengthened so that children and young people in all regions learn about food in all its complexity across Scotland.

Teachers and all staff will be given training to nurture a good food culture in schools, so that every child will leave school with basic skills in growing, harvesting, preparing and eating good food. More links will be made between urban and rural schools to restore the connections between the very different environments in which children and young people live.

For example, Crofting Connections will be enabled to set up more partnerships with schools in urban areas, involving reciprocal visits and studying local food projects in each area, such as the partnership between Castlebay Community School in Barra and Queen Anne High in Dunfermline, where schools compare
their local food initiatives, the Hebridean Living project and the Fife Diet project, and the very different landscapes which support them.

The problems of an ageing and undervalued workforce in all aspects of Scotland’s food sector will be a thing of the past, as skilled and motivated young people take an active part in farming, crofting, fishing, food processing, marketing, retailing, cooking and enjoying good quality produce.

In the Highlands and Islands, all schools in crofting communities will include crofting in the curriculum.

Young people will feel proud to be part of their crofting communities, with a better balance between generations working the land and contributing to a healthy local food system.

Crofting will be valued as the appropriate system of food production in the remote communities of the Highlands and Islands and not seen as less important than larger-scale farming of more ‘agriculturally productive’ parts of Scotland.

“Rather than being a sentimental subsidy to a past way of life, official enthusiasm and support for crofting could be a solution to many of the economic, societal and environmental issues facing our modern world.”

*Martin Shucksmith: Committee of Inquiry on Crofting Final report 2008*

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

We believe that the vision of Becoming a Good Food Nation is a very encouraging next step after Recipe for Success. We should like to see more emphasis on support for primary production – farming, crofting, horticulture and fishing - in the vision. This is the very foundation of Becoming a Good Food Nation.

In the Highlands and Islands, young people have a unique opportunity to access small pieces of land in crofting townships, through crofting tenure, where they can benefit from the wisdom of crofting culture, the experience of older crofters, the traditional practice of sharing tasks at busy times, the structures of grazings committees to manage common land and the inspiration from active crofting entrepreneurs who have diversified into mixed animal husbandry and horticulture to serve the local food market. Community-owned estates welcome the voices and talents of young people in creating the healthy community ownership models of the future.

Links need to be made between the food policy and other policy areas to ensure that young people will be given support to access crofts and to acquire the skills they need to be part of a successful local food system that contributes to the economic, social and environmental wellbeing that will create the vibrant crofting communities of the future.
As long ago as 1998, Fiona MacKenzie (now Honorary professor at UHI) pointed to the recognition by the Scottish Crofters’ Union (now the Scottish Crofting Federation) of these links: “The crofting areas may have had ‘comparatively little to offer nationally and internationally in food production terms’, [the Scottish Crofters’ Union writes] but as ‘a model of how rural communities can be organised in ways which both safeguard the natural environment and permit the integration of agriculture with a wide range of other income-earning opportunities … the crofting experience is of quite outstanding importance’. What were once considered to be the weaknesses of crofting have become strengths.”

Fiona MacKenzie, ‘Coit do’n bein sibh?’ ‘Where do you belong to?: Land, identity, and community in the Isle of Harris, May 1998

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

To support our submission, we asked young people from Crofting Connections secondary schools in Highland and the Western Isles to give their views on Becoming and Good Food Nation. These views are captured in reporting from discussion groups and in interviews to camera in the film ‘Food from the Croft’ (password Beremeal).

The film was made at a gathering in Assynt of secondary school pupils from S2 to S5. The locations were Glencanisp Lodge, owned by the Assynt Foundation and a croft that is part of the Assynt Crofters Trust.

This was a very small sample, but its significance is that the pupils represented a range of pupils from those living in remote estates and small islands to those living in or near Stornoway, with no family connections or access to crofting.

- 31% of these pupils live on crofts in the West Highlands and the Isle of Lewis. Of these, most are working crofts, some of which are on community-owned estates, including the Isle of Eigg, Knoydart Estate in West Highland and Galson Estate in Lewis.
- Several pupils have been, or will be, assigned a family croft.
- 54% would very much like to acquire a croft or at least to live in a crofting community when they leave school.
- Some did not see crofting as within their reach.
- Two pupils saw going away to acquire professional qualifications as a step to returning to work in crofting communities. One wants to be a vet.
- The other talked of her ambition to become a crofting lawyer, attracted by both the need for such role and the significant earning capacity in the legal profession.
- 73% said they had learnt more about local food in the course of the gathering.
In the context of the discussion on Becoming a Good Food Nation, it was apparent that these young people are very aware of the quality of local food produced on a small scale on crofts. For them it tastes better, the fruit and vegetables are fresher than those that have to travel a long distance to get to the remote areas in which some of them live, but they are also aware that local food in remote areas is more expensive and is regarded by some as a luxury.

- They do not shy away from recognising the responsibility of raising or hunting animals for meat consumption.
- They are proud of what they produce.
- They feel a sense of being part of the land, of ‘something bigger’.
- They feel a real sense of belonging in community gatherings where neighbours celebrate the food they produce.

Some are happy to eat the traditional croft diet of meat, tatties, root vegetables and brassicas, while others wish to eat more contemporary vegetables and fruit associated with cosmopolitan or vegetarian diets, such as tomatoes, peppers, chillies, cucumbers and fruits, which are not easy to grow in the cold, wet and windy areas of the crofting counties without protected cropping such as natural shelter belts, glasshouses and polytunnels.

They are aware of the challenges of the soil, the weather, the hard work, the isolation of their communities and the low status of crofters - “my father doesn’t want me to be a crofter because I am clever enough to go to university” – yet for some they wouldn’t want to live anywhere else.

Being part of a Good Food Nation for them means:
- being able to get a croft;
- acquiring crofting skills and knowledge at school and in local colleges;
- working with their neighbours;
- learning from older members of the community;
- going away to study and then returning with qualifications that will serve the community;
- and, most of all, being respected for being crofters.

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

Before we set out on this journey we should like to see more links between Education and crofting, so that Curriculum for Excellence priorities such as food education, global citizenship, learning for sustainability, outdoor learning and place-based education.

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2 Education Scotland [www.educationscotland.gov.uk](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk)
The Vision for Crofting
On the Crofting Commission website, the Scottish Government declares that it “recognises the wider benefits of crofting to rural communities, food production and managing Scotland’s magnificent natural environment and we are firmly committed to developing the sector to secure its future.

“We look forward to working with the Scottish Crofting Federation, the Crofting Commission and other stakeholders on the future of crofting in Scotland.”

We should like to see food production in crofting communities very high on this agenda and linked to food education in schools, especially to Rural Skills and crofting courses and the new National Progression Award in Local Food Production, Level 6, validated in early 2014.

HIE Crofting Development
Crofting skills
Newcomers and existing crofters can benefit from an extensive programme of practical training delivered by the Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF) with funding from HIE and the Scottish Government Skills Development Scheme. Courses in subjects as varied as dry stone dyking, fencing, soil analysis, sheep shearing, livestock husbandry, poultry keeping, deer management, fruit growing and thatching are available across the region.

Supply chain support
“HIE has funded the Community Retailing Network, now part of the Plunkett Foundation, which supports rural communities to establish co-operatives and community enterprises, including food initiatives. In 2013 the Plunkett Foundation successfully ran a series of workshops in the Western Isles, Skye and Shetland, bringing together local food producers and community shops with the aim of increasing the availability of local food in the local shops.” Supporting Crofting Communities, HIE 2014

HIE, along with the Scottish Government and Heritage Lottery Fund, supports the work of Crofting Connections in schools – we should like to see a more joined-up approach to crofting skills development and supply chain support which can be reflected in the curriculum, as above.

SRUC
Working with SRUC rural policy team and its advisory services, the Crofting Commission sets out its aim to deliver the Scottish Government vision for crofting: “A rural Scotland that is sustainable, outward looking and dynamic - with a diverse economy and active communities, where rural prosperity can increase in ways that make best use of all resources - is important to the Scottish Government.”

“To assist in achieving this, the Scottish Government provides funding towards the provision of the rural advisory service in the crofting counties. SRUC is commissioned annually and this service is delivered locally through its SAC Consulting division as part of the Veterinary and Advisory Services (VAS) programme.”

We should like to see more young people encouraged to train in animal husbandry and health as part of a successful and thriving workforce in crofting communities.

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

A Food Commission will take an overarching approach to food in Scotland. It will represent the interests of all sectors of society and will ensure that key voices are heard:
- those who are most at risk of food poverty and diet-related ill-health, particularly the ‘hidden poor’ of rural communities;
- those working in undervalued jobs within the food industry;
- children and young people throughout Scotland for whom good food should be a right and not a privilege.

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

The Crofting Development programme, delivered by Highlands and Islands Enterprise in partnership with the Crofting Commission, the Scottish Government, the Scottish Crofting Federation and other agencies, seeks to “support individual crofters and crofting activity, to ensure that crofting communities continue to thrive, becoming more resilient and able to meet opportunities and challenges.”

We believe that Becoming a Good Food Nation lies at the heart of these opportunities and challenges for young people in crofting communities, and that food needs to be made much more of a focus in future Crofting Development programmes. In practice, this would mean support for:
- the creation of new crofts and the revitalising of existing neglected crofts to give young people access to land on which they can produce good food;
- education and training in schools, colleges and universities to cover a range of skills that will attract talented young people into crofting communities, including vets, abattoir workers, butchers, soil scientists,

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agricultural botanists, crofting lawyers, croft assessors, and environmentalists, all of whom could be part-time skilled crofters themselves;

- supervised apprenticeships on crofts, especially on community-owned crofting estates.

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

N/A

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 discussion sessions and individual interviews of young people at Glencanisp Lodge covered the topics above either implicitly or explicitly. Their views are well expressed in the film Food from the Croft – see link in Q4 above.

**Food in the public sector**: Pupils wanted to see more very local food in their school meals.

**A children’s food policy**: this was not discussed as such, but it is clear that a policy is needed which reflects the views of children and young people and their families.

**Local food**: Local food production was considered very important by most pupils. Most of them are involved in helping on family or neighbouring crofts, in helping game-keepers or in growing vegetables in family gardens. Most agreed that local food was better because it was fresher and more traceable. They felt a connection to it that for some made it more satisfying to eat. Local food was linked with community cohesion and celebration.

**Good food choices**: The pupils had largely traditional tastes in food – meat, fish, potatoes, root vegetables and brassicas are enjoyed by most of them, though a significant number did not eat fish and some had a limited taste for vegetables. At the gathering most chose to eat the conventional meals of lamb casserole and roast beef, potatoes and vegetables sourced from the Highlands. Some chose the vegetarian option reflecting the need to be able to produce a wider range of vegetables locally. Pupils felt that there was limited choice in remote communities for those who had to buy fresh produce – it was often in poor condition by the time
it reached them. To have real choice they felt they needed land to grow their own food. Some felt a need for more education in healthy eating, starting at a younger age in schools. All were aware of the need to watch salt intake and to read labels on packaged food.

**Continued economic growth**: Continued economic growth on its own is not the solution. Pupils were aware that crofting is a way of life. In crofting communities, food production is linked with cultural values, economic growth with social and environmental sustainability.

10. Which other areas would you prioritise?

N/A

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

Crofting Connections would like to see more dialogue across government and agencies working in Rural Policy, Education and Lifelong Learning and Land Use, to raise the profile of crofting as an appropriate context for small-scale food production and local economic activity, within the context of looking after the natural environment, safeguarding the cultural heritage and encouraging young people to be active members of some of our most remote and fragile communities in the Highlands and Islands.

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?

**In the next month** Crofting Connections will have a presence at the Scottish Rural Parliament in Oban and at the Croft Assessors’ Conference in Inverness with two young people from Crofting Connections secondary schools representing the project at each event. These young ambassadors have been nominated at the gathering in Assynt. They will have an opportunity to talk about their vision for the future of crofting and in particular their views on the importance of food production to the future of crofts and crofting communities.

**In the next twelve months**, Crofting Connections will continue its work in up to 160 nurseries, primary and secondary schools throughout the crofting counties and will continue to act as a champion for the right of children and young people to learn about crofting in the curriculum, within school and in the wider community.
In 2015, Crofting Connections, in partnership with the James Hutton Institute, will launch the second edition of Soils of the Croft, as part of Scotland’s contribution to the International Year of the Soil 2015\(^5\), to highlight the vital part which the soil plays in sustaining the communities of the crofting counties.

It will reinstate the message that even the most challenging soils are not a barrier to the production of good quality local food, which should be the birth right of this generation of young crofters in the feeding of their families, their local communities and in some cases in selling their produce further afield.

14. How did you hear about this Discussion Document?

Crofting Connections, as a member of the Food Education Partnership, received an invitation to the launch.

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\(^5\) The International Year of Soils 2015 (IYS) will serve as a platform for raising awareness on the importance of sustainable soil management as the basis for food systems, fuel and fibre production, essential ecosystem functions and ultimately allow for a better adaptation to climate change for present and future generations [http://www.fao.org/soils-2015/en/](http://www.fao.org/soils-2015/en/)
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.