CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

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

Slow Food Scotland fully supports the aim for Scotland to become a Good Food Nation. This can deliver many benefits for individuals, communities and the country as a whole – social and health benefits, environmental benefits and economic benefits. However, it is important that the definition of 'good food' is robust enough. It must not simply be a new tagline used to rebrand a ‘business as usual’ situation – key issues must not be ignored, especially impact on the environment, and the over-processing and industrialisation of much of our food.

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

Slow Food Scotland – and its partner Slow Food organisations elsewhere in the UK, Europe and further afield – champion food which is good, clean and fair. We would argue that Scotland will be a good food nation when its food and food systems are genuinely good, clean and fair.

Good food – a fresh, nutritious and flavoursome seasonal diet which satisfies the senses and is part of the local culture

Clean food – production and consumption which doesn’t do harm to the many aspects of the environment, to animal welfare or to human health

Fair food – accessible prices to consumers for good food with fair conditions and pay for producers

For example:
1. Good food would be available to all in our society
2. Small scale farmers and food producers fed their local communities in all areas of Scotland via short supply chains and independent retailers.
3. Land, in urban and rural areas, would be more readily available to those who wanted grow food on it.
4. We would be a nation proud of its food culture and heritage, and thus prepared to engage with it.
5. Dietary related illnesses would be on the decrease
6. Sustainable farming and growing methods, free from or less reliant on chemical and fossil fuel input, was enshrined as the method of choice.

We see challenges for Scotland in addressing all three of Good – Clean – Fair. These challenges can be overcome, but we are concerned that the approach set out in the consultation document glosses over some of the major issues involved.
3. Do you agree with the proposed vision? How would you improve it?

As mentioned above, we both support the aim for Scotland to become a Good Food Nation – but also have some concerns about the approach set out in the consultation paper.

Sustainable – we welcome the emphasis on the importance of our food being produced in an environmentally and socially sustainable way; however, we feel that some aspects of sustainability are addressed in a rudimentary way which risks ignoring some very real issues. For example, on page 23 of the document there is reference to reducing the number of definitions of what constitutes sustainable food – and taking an approach which is ‘based on celebration and class neutrality’. While much of the food produced from low-input farming and fishing systems in Scotland is genuinely sustainable, a large proportion of the country’s production still depends heavily on inputs such as energy from fossil fuels, artificial fertilisers and the use of pesticides. Although there are programmes to reduce the environmental impacts of food production systems in Scotland, significant environmental risks remain – especially in the more intensively-farmed parts of the country such as the arable areas in the eastern plains and the dairy farming areas of the south-west. The consultation document refers to ‘unspoilt landscapes, clear air and pristine waters from which our produce comes from’ – this is the case in a few parts of the country, but is by no means the picture across the whole country. Even ‘rich pastures’ are mainly the result of heavy applications of nitrogen fertilisers which often lead to pollution of both water courses and the air, as well as producing rapidly-grown grass high in sugars and protein, but low in other nutrients needed by healthy livestock.

Animal welfare – while there has been significant progress to improve the conditions in which many farm animals are kept, many of Scotland’s cattle and pigs live in stressful conditions in intensive systems. For example, dairy cows now yield much more than in previous decades, but with increased health problems and much shorter productive lifespans.

Exports – while exports of food and drink do benefit the economy and showcase Scotland overseas, the emphasis in developing the country as a Good Food Nation should be on improving the food here in Scotland as much as possible. Exporting food uses energy for transport – an increasingly costly resource. Producing food for export reduces what is available to help address issues of poor diet here in Scotland. It would be better to focus on ensuring good food stays at home as much as possible – and is readily-available to all who eat in Scotland, whether people who live here or those visiting for business or on holiday.

4. How would your life be better? What does being a Good Food Nation mean in your locality?
As an organisation which represents people across Scotland, it is difficult to comment on particular localities. However, key things a Good Food Nation should mean at a local level include:

- Better connections and understanding among producers and consumers
- More celebration of and pride in what Scotland’s larder provides in different places and at different times of the year
- Straightforward access for all to food which is good, clean and fair

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

We argue that it is important – as set out above – to be prepared to tackle some of the key issues around sustainability of food-production systems. These issues include the environmental and animal welfare impacts of some of Scotland’s more intensive farming systems; the increasing industrialisation and over-processing of our food (which not only uses energy, but also reduces the nutritional value); and the continued loss of diversity in and around our food systems – whether that is the loss of wildlife which shares our land with food production, the loss of different ways of doing things or the loss of crop and animal varieties which don’t always fit with what is seen as the ‘efficient’ way of doing things. This diversity may seem like ‘inefficiency’ now – but is likely to be a key part of resilience as food security issues become more prevalent.

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

We feel that a Food Commission can have both a ‘brokerage role’ – getting agreement among different interests – as well as a ‘challenge role’ in holding the government and other interests to account and accountable for their actions.

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

We feel the key areas for indicators are:

- diversity in our food systems (both ways of doing things and the varieties used) which address local variations
- affordability and accessibility of good, clean and fair food
- environmental impacts of our food production systems
- the understanding among the people of Scotland about where their food comes from
- the perception of Scotland and Scotland’s food among visitors and potential visitors to the country

8. What are your views on the different approaches that could be taken to help us become a Good Food Nation?
We agree that a range of approaches is needed – some things will work well in some areas, but not in others. There is lots of variation across Scotland (even over short distances) in terms of rural/urban environments, income levels, attitudes to both food and the landscape, how people value convenience or the way they use their time.

However, we strongly support the emphasis in both the approaches given as examples at the end of page 20.

Firstly, Slow Food puts great store by the social value of food – eating should be a social act as much as possible; a social act should be about celebration.

Secondly, we feel that access to healthy, nutritious food should be a right of everyone. While there are genuine issues of affordability to address, we also need to challenge the view that good food is always expensive and unhealthy food will always be the cheaper option. Often it is that people are lacking the key resource of information – information on where to get affordable good food, but also the knowledge and skills to make best use of the ingredients when they get them.

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 support the focus on the first four of these. While we understand the Scottish Government’s wish to continue to emphasise economic growth, we feel the focus of work to move towards becoming a Good Food Nation should be more about addressing the specific food-related issues. This is more likely to improve the wellbeing of many of the disadvantaged groups in Scotland than putting more effort into driving exports.

10. Which other areas would you prioritise?

As we have commented in response to question 8, we feel there needs to be more emphasis in helping people understand both how to access affordable nutritious food (to some extent this could be covered under food choices) and how to make best use of it once they have it.

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

We think Scotland and Scotland’s food culture could benefit greatly by engaging with food interests across the world – not just to drive exports or attract tourists, but to be part of a wider ‘knowledge exchange’ on how to
address the many challenges we and others face. There will be things we can tell and teach others about as well as things we can learn from others.

Slow Food Scotland is closely linked to the wider Slow Food network spanning the globe – Slow Food groups are found in over 150 countries, so we can help access a vast wealth of knowledge and experience.

12. What else should be considered?

Given that there are ten years between now and the target date of 2025, it would be an idea to develop a list of ten key steps for Scotland to make to becoming a Good Food Nation by 2025. While each of these steps wouldn’t be only worked on in one year, each year to 2025 could have a different Good Food Nation theme as we make the journey.

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?

We plan to establish a network of Slow Food local groups around Scotland to help promote local, small-scale producers and help them link with people looking to buy good, clean and fair food. In addition, we plan to further develop our links with others in the global Slow Food network to both learn from them and to share our experience and knowledge with them.

14. How did you hear about this Discussion Document?

Press releases from Scottish Government and others such as Nourish and Soil Association Scotland.