

## Agriculture, Fisheries and Rural Affairs

### Becoming a Good Food Nation: An analysis of consultation responses

Alison Platts & Jennifer Waterton  
Griesbach & Associates

Between June and October 2014, the Scottish Government undertook a public consultation to inform development of a revised national food and drink policy. The consultation paper set out an aspiration for Scotland to become a 'Good Food Nation' and the intention that this would be based on a cross-policy approach. It sought opinion on the Good Food Nation vision and on matters relevant to achieving it. The consultation received 229 submissions. The analysis of the responses aimed to present the range of views submitted, and the key points are summarised here.

### Main Findings

- The overall message from the consultation was one of widespread support and, indeed, enthusiasm for the aspiration for Scotland to become a Good Food Nation, with respondents welcoming the broad cross-policy approach advocated and the benefits this might bring.
- Alongside this general support, respondents recognised that this was a complex and long-term agenda with deep-seated cultural challenges, and a wide array of stakeholders giving rise to competing interests and policy tensions.
- The Good Food nation agenda was seen as providing an opportunity to encourage debate and bring coherence to this cross-cutting issue.
- There was a widespread view that any focus on economic growth would need to be framed in terms of *sustainable* economic growth rather than economic growth per se.
- Respondents highlighted the importance of a fully developed blueprint for action with measurable aims and objectives, specific actions, adequate resourcing and a robust evaluation framework.
- There was a strongly expressed view across all respondent types that tackling food poverty should be central to any aspiration Scotland had to be a Good Food Nation.
- All five priority areas identified attracted some support from respondents, with 'food in the public sector' and 'local food', in particular, affirmed on a broad basis.
- Respondents endorsed the preliminary steps and proposed multi-stranded approach to delivering the Good Food Nation agenda, with the proposed Food Commission seen as having an important role in coordinating effort and providing leadership.
- Respondents were keen to see an integrated, inclusive and bold approach which capitalised on the full range of policy levers available.
- There was a strong appetite to build on the many existing initiatives and activities that were already up and running in Scotland.

## Background

Between June and October 2014, the Scottish Government undertook a public consultation to inform development of a revised national food and drink policy. The consultation paper set out the Government's aspiration to become a 'Good Food Nation' and the intention that this would be based on a cross-policy approach encompassing – amongst other things – health and wellbeing, environmental sustainability, local food production, as well as the continued development of Scotland's food and drink sector.

The consultation paper contained 13 open questions which sought opinion on the Good Food Nation aspiration and on a range of matters relevant to achieving the vision. In addition, the discussion paper invited individuals, communities and organisations to consider the impact that being a Good Food Nation would have on them, and the actions they could take to help achieve the vision.

The consultation was launched at a Ministerial event and promoted through various routes to help ensure it reached its target audience.

The consultation attracted 229 submissions. The aim of the analysis was to present the wide range of views offered. The responses were examined using a qualitative thematic approach and the key points from the analysis are summarised here.

## Responses and respondents

A total of 229 submissions were received comprising written responses (186), survey responses (33) and feedback from consultation activities run by stakeholder organisations (10). Many of the written responses had been informed by discussion and debate within and between organisations and their own stakeholders groups.

Two thirds of the written responses were from organisations; the remaining third were from individuals. Organisational respondents

came from the public, private and third sectors and included local authorities; health and environment bodies (national and local); community groups and national third sector groups with an interest in food, health and / or sustainability; commercial-scale food producers, manufacturers and retailers.

## The vision

The findings of this consultation have shown that there is widespread support, and indeed enthusiasm, for the vision and the overall 'direction of travel', as set out in *Becoming a Good Food Nation*.

Both individual and organisational respondents welcomed the broad focus of the discussion document and recognised the potential benefits for the environment, the economy, population health, and social justice and cohesion more generally which the successful implementation of such a broadly based policy approach might achieve. They were also in agreement that tackling deep-seated cultural issues and changing Scotland's relationship with food was vital. Furthermore, one of the benefits of the Good Food Nation agenda was the opportunity it provided to raise the profile of work in this area, to bring strategic direction and encourage further activity.

Alongside this broad support, there was recognition of the challenges in achieving the vision. Here, changing Scotland's relationship with food was highlighted by many; achieving a more positive food culture (with respondents drawing comparison with other European countries) was seen as a long-term process. Moreover, the policy terrain is complex, with a vast array of stakeholders and many competing interests which need to be acknowledged and resolved. The bold vision set out in *Becoming a Good Food Nation* requires to be matched by a bold and fully integrated policy stance in order to be credible. Clarity about the definitions of some basic terms and principles (e.g. 'local food', 'good food', 'sustainable economic growth') is also required.

The main tensions identified were between: i) (reducing) environmental impacts and (increasing) economic growth and ii) encouraging local food growing / initiatives on the one hand and encouraging exports and developing export markets on the other. There was a widespread view that any focus on economic growth would need to be framed in terms of *sustainable* economic growth rather than economic growth per se.

Food poverty was a major concern across all respondent types. The issues around ensuring access to healthy and affordable food for all were thought to be of central importance to any aspiration Scotland might have to be a Good Food Nation. This perspective dominated the responses from social justice organisations; however reducing food poverty was also central to the concerns of many individuals and organisations across all sectors.

While respondents were in favour of the general approach set out, they recognised that it was very ‘high level’. There was concern that the discussion document did not provide a blueprint for action, and respondents therefore also focused on the importance of translating the strategic vision into a clear plan with measurable aims and objectives, specific actions and adequate resourcing. This was necessary in order to provide a framework for implementing this ambitious agenda and for measuring progress in relation to short, medium and long-term outcomes.

## Setting priorities

As would be expected given the wide range of stakeholders, a large number of priorities were identified for early action. Of the priorities suggested in the discussion document, ‘food in the public sector’ and ‘local food’ were affirmed on a broad basis. ‘Economic growth’ was a high priority for those involved in the food producer, retail, and enterprise sectors; but others thought this should take a lower priority. The other identified priorities (‘a children’s food policy’ and ‘good food choices’) attracted a more mixed response. Although there was universal agreement that improving the diet and food habits of children was essential, it was questioned whether this should be tackled through an isolated policy.

More generally, the priorities identified by respondents related to: improving the sustainability of all aspects of the food production process; reducing the environmental impacts of food production; improving health, diet and nutrition; reducing food poverty; improving education and skills in relation to food and nutrition; empowering consumers and communities; using legislation and regulation to improve food choices; and increasing employment and educational opportunities. The balance and emphasis for these priorities varied, with respondents often highlighting the issues which were at the core of their organisational or personal agendas.

## Defining and measuring progress and success

Common themes in describing a successful Good Food Nation included good quality locally produced food for all, healthy diets and lifestyles, improved health outcomes, a positive food culture, home and community-grown food, environmentally and

financially sustainable food production methods, vibrant communities, and a strong food and drink economy at national and local levels.

Respondents were consistent in arguing for a robust evaluation framework which took a holistic approach to assessing progress towards the Good Food Nation vision, and the importance of this being in place from the outset. Respondents also suggested a wide variety of specific indicators for measuring success. They often saw the development of an evaluation framework as just one element of initial analytical groundwork which would include policy audits, mapping work, research and evidence reviews etc. This was required to fully understand the current situation, to establish baselines and to move forward in an informed and evidence-based way.

## Implementation and delivery

Respondents endorsed the preliminary steps and broad approach to delivering the Good Food Nation agenda. There was general consensus about the need to involve the right people and organisations including representatives of the food and drink industry, third sector organisations, community groups, experts and academics, and individuals with different perspectives and backgrounds.

Coordination across policy areas and organisations was also seen as key, with early work advocated to review and establish linkages and achieve buy-in from different stakeholders.

There was recognition of the need for a multi-stranded approach which would cross-cut many policy areas. Respondents were keen to see an inclusive, holistic, integrated and bold approach which capitalised on the full range of levers available to the Scottish Government. There were also strong calls for a bottom-up as well as a top-down approach which recognised and gave a voice to existing local and grass-roots activity in this area.

A Food Commission was generally thought to be a good idea in order to coordinate effort in this area and to provide leadership. It was vital that such a Commission should have a clear remit which articulated fully with other organisations and institutional structures within this policy landscape. Respondents wanted the membership of the Commission to be broad-based, and the working methods to be clear and transparent, with all conflicts of interest fully declared.

# Helping Scotland become a Good Food Nation

Organisational respondents described a wider range of current initiatives and forward plans across all sectors which would contribute to the achievement of the Good Food Nation vision. These included, amongst other things, food and health projects, community growing initiatives, environmental activities and business development and diversification plans.

There was a strong appetite to build on these many extant initiatives and programmes which were already up and running in Scotland, and to invest in projects and programmes which were providing a lead in this area. These included broad initiatives covering much of the territory mapped out in *Becoming a Good Food Nation*, but also small single-focus projects operating in specific localities.

Individual respondents also described steps they were already taking in their own daily lives or within their communities which aligned with the Good Food Nation vision.

Moreover, the existence of such a wide range of ongoing work provides evidence that, for many of those responding to the consultation, this was not the 'start of a journey', but part of an ongoing process.

Looking to the future, organisations provided details of plans for the coming year representing either a continuation of existing work, or the start of new initiatives. Individuals cited a range of lifestyle changes which they would make in relation to growing, purchasing, cooking and eating food, or participating in food-related community activities, representing small, but important, steps in becoming a Good Food Nation.

There was also a desire to learn from international evidence and experience, and to link the efforts in Scotland into wider (European, international, global) perspectives. In doing this, the importance of an evidence-based approach was affirmed.

Overall, therefore, there was a strong commitment amongst respondents to the concept of becoming a Good Food Nation.

Respondents were, however, clear that the Good Food Nation vision on its own was not enough. Appropriate policies, underpinned by a fully developed blueprint for action, combined with adequate funding and support (both practical and political) were required if the vision is to be realised.

This document, along with full research report of the project, and further information about social and policy research commissioned and published on behalf of the Scottish Government, can be viewed on the Internet at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch>. If you have any further queries about social research, please contact us at [socialresearch@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:socialresearch@scotland.gsi.gov.uk) or on 0131-244 2111.