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The Food Discussion
Room 256
Pentland House
47 Robb's Loan
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25th April 2008

Dear Sir/Madam

Response to Choosing the Right Ingredients

Forward Scotland welcomes the discussion on the future for food in Scotland and commends the government for bringing into focus for the first time the complexity of issues that revolve around the food we grow and eat.

We believe that the discussion will solicit evidence and recommendations from a wide range of organisations, business and communities to the Scottish Government that will call for a coherent and ambitious policy for food in Scotland.

A food policy that recognises a role for local food can provide a framework that enables the realisation of the opportunity that it presents for progress towards a more sustainable society. Local food benefits the local economy through support for local producers, it can provide viable long-term employment and maintain employment particularly in rural communities, and it can engage people in healthier lifestyles and reduce the carbon footprint of the food we consume.

Forward Scotland is keen to support and complement the work of the Scottish Government in promoting sustainable development and tackling climate change. We would be pleased to meet with you if clarification or further detail is required.

Yours faithfully

Frazer Scott
Acting Chief Executive

Choosing the Right Ingredients

A CONTRIBUTION FROM FORWARD SCOTLAND

Forward Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond and provide feedback to the Scottish Government's discussion on the future for food in Scotland. We are happy to have this response placed in the public domain, and invite questions or further discussion on any issues raised in this document.

Forward Scotland is an NGO that promotes action for sustainable development. For over ten years the organisation has championed innovative approaches to creating a culture of sustainable development. Much of our work involves building the capacity and commitment of communities across Scotland to become more sustainable through practical action to improve their local environment.

Over the years we have delivered work on a range of 'local' food related topics from a review of Scotland's Allotments to support for the establishment of local growing projects in Aberdeen and Renfrewshire and food network projects in areas including Forth Valley. It is with this experience we respond to the discussion.

OVERVIEW OF THE BILL

Forward Scotland welcomes the discussion on the future for food in Scotland and commends the government for bringing into focus for the first time the complexity of issues that revolve around the food we grow and eat.

We believe that the discussion will solicit evidence and recommendations from a wide range of organisations, business and communities to the Scottish Government that will call for a coherent and ambitious policy for food in Scotland.

Forward Scotland believes that a society that embraces the principals of sustainable development recognises that the current system is unsustainable. There is an opportunity to reduce climate change impacts, protect biodiversity, make a positive contribution to the nations health whilst supporting local economic activity through the greater availability of local food.

Food and an emphasis on local food has a significant contribution to make in supporting local economic activity, providing jobs and stability in local communities and reducing Scotland's carbon footprint therefore making progress towards a more sustainable future.

Our Vision

Forward Scotland is disappointed by the vision present for food. Its language is unengaging and uninspiring without a great sense of what needs to be achieved.

It is important that the government seeks to connect food to its stated 5 strategic goals. However it is not clear from the discussion how issues of potential conflict will be resolved between the 5 goals.

The stated desire of this government to be 'joined up' in its policy and actions requires conflict resolution protocols and a framework for decision making. The potential conflict is evident in the overlapping nature of many policy areas, for example Climate Change and Planning. Forward Scotland believes a sustainable development approach can address these issues and should form the basis for decision making.

Forward Scotland calls on the Scottish Government to rearticulate clearly its position on sustainable development and how we will work with the other nations within the UK and Europe across the full range of policy areas to drive forward change.

Involving everyone

Forward Scotland believes that our society needs to embrace a culture of sustainable development and the key to unlocking this, and to drive behaviour change, is to inspire its people.

In our experience food is an issue that not only affects us all but engages people directly and there is evidence from the growth of more local access to produce from Scotland that our society has an 'appetite' for local food.

Over the last few years there has been growing concern and dissatisfaction about the food we eat. Food scares, the use of chemicals, rising obesity and diet-related problems, reports on animal welfare and a lack of flavour has led us to ask questions about the origins and production methods of the food we buy. As a result the profile and popularity of local food is growing.

However, 'Local food', a term in common usage, is one where there is no agreed or consistent definition and as a consequence is open to a wide range of interpretations.

Organisations tend to apply their own definitions for their own purposes. 'Local', 'regional' 'speciality' and Scottish are all commonly used generic terms, with the same food changing status depending on where it is sold.

The Soil Association defines a sustainable local food economy as being '*A system of producing, processing and trading, primarily of organic and sustainable forms of food production, where physical and economic activity is largely contained and controlled within the locality or region where it was produced, which delivers health, economic, environmental and social benefits to the communities in those areas.*'

Beyond this definition the National Association of Farmers' Markets and traders have sought to determine a measure for locality and this appears to be measured as being less than 30-50 miles of where the goods are being sold.

Indeed worryingly food labeled as, or regarded by shoppers, as 'local' may well have accumulated significant additional food miles as a result of the system of distribution operated by our supermarkets. The vast majority of these miles are 'road' miles rather than air miles. There appears to be a widely held misconception that air miles play the most significant proportion of foods contribution to the UK's ecological footprint.

Research in England and Wales for the Food Standards Agency has found that the majority of people (62%) want an official definition or guidance on the use of the term 'local' in food marketing. It also found that a large proportion of people think of 'local' as within 10 miles (40%) or within their county (20%), and that most do not perceive food using ingredients from outside of the area, but packaged or manufactured in the area, as 'local food'.

The absence of an agreed definition of "local" increased the risk of the term being misused, increasing confusion amongst policy makers, business and consumers alike.

Forward Scotland calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that a consistent approach is applied in the use of the term 'local food' across its policy areas and in the activities of its agencies and local authorities.

Who we sell to

Whilst there is information provided on the value of the food sector, as a whole there is insufficient evidence at this time to provide a reliable estimate of the economic impact of 'local food' and therefore it is difficult to anticipate a future economic value. There have been some estimates of the economic benefits from think tanks and local organisations.

A study by the New Economics Foundation '*Plugging the Leaks*' indicated that spending £10 in a local organic box scheme results in a £25.90 investment in the local economy.

Spending the same £10 at a supermarket would result in £14 of local investment. Current sales estimates of local, regional and speciality foods in Scotland range from £400 million to £500 million per annum.

It is clear that buying local food maintains local jobs and helps support the local economy by keeping a higher proportion of money in the area. This could be important in contributing to regeneration and development in rural areas.

It is also clear that with our purchasing habits there has been a rapid decline in the number of farmers and producers in the UK and this has had an impact on local economies, particularly in rural areas.

Forward Scotland calls on the Scottish Government to commission a comprehensive study of the economic multiplier effect of 'local food' to ensure that when decisions are being made at a local and national level all the relevant information is available.

In relation to procurement, more needs to be done to encourage local economic activity that can satisfy the procurement demands of Scotland's public sector, a significant market for food.

Food procurement appears to disadvantage smaller producers which runs contrary to the nature of the government's discussion paper. The Scottish Government should work closely with public sector procurement staff to ensure that the 'playing field' is indeed level, ensuring compliance with EU procurement but not excluding smaller-scale producers.

How we eat

Recent research paints a poor picture of Scotland's health. Evidence from the Scottish Health Survey 2003, suggests mixed progress in improving Scotland's health. It demonstrates that people in Scotland have a fondness for smoking and drinking – often to excess – and a poor diet which depends heavily on fatty foods, and low levels of exercise.

Local food can play an important role in increasing access to fresh, healthy food. The decline in local shops and increase in out-of-town supermarkets leaves many people, particularly those in deprived and remote areas, with limited access to fresh food.

Community food initiatives, box schemes, farmers markets and encouraging local shops to source locally can help.

Some reports indicate that local food is healthier than 'standard' food because it is likely to be fresher and therefore have a higher nutritional value. It is also likely to have been produced less intensively and therefore contain less chemical fertiliser, pesticides, herbicides and fungicides which may be detrimental to health.

In wider terms, food is sociable and enjoyable but there is a commonly held view that in our changing society we are losing not only our knowledge of food and how to prepare and cook it but also our interest in and enjoyment of it and this is contributing to our poor diet. It is believed that local food can help counter-act this by re-connecting people with the producers and urban areas to the countryside and facilitating education. Also, in helping to preserve and celebrate local tradition, culture and identity.

Forward Scotland calls on the Scottish Government to prioritise support for activities that contribute to changing attitudes to food in our schools and communities.

What we choose

Preliminary investigations indicate that the 'local' food sector in Scotland is very active and has been steadily gaining a higher profile through campaigns such as 'eat local' and through local food awards, festivals and directories. Indeed the Government has continued to support many of these activities since May 2007. However all this activity would benefit from having a clear policy and framework in order to evidence the connections between them.

Enthusiastic and committed individuals throughout Scotland have developed highly innovative schemes that have achieved excellent results. For example, farmers markets are now running in many parts of Scotland, box/home delivery schemes appear to be growing in both demand and supply and there are some very successful community growing initiatives.

Activity tends to be scattered unevenly. The growth of Farmers Markets to well over 75 in 2006 lends strength to the suggestion that people want to buy locally-produced food. However, it is unfortunate that the supply local food produce does not seem to be able to meet this increase in demand.

Research by the Institute of Grocery Distribution also indicates that, in seeking quality and freshness and through the belief that it is better for the environment and local producers and retailers, people are buying more local food and want to buy more.

While consumer demand is growing there appears to be a perception that locally-produced food is expensive, may not be value for money and tends to be for niche markets. Over 7%

of the Scottish population have visited a Farmers' Market but it appears that this is still largely the preserve of those who can afford to with very few markets located in areas of low income.

Advocates of local food will point out that the products for sale are being traded at prices that reflect the 'true' costs of production in a way that supermarkets do not but this is nonetheless a barrier to engaging those in deprived areas.

Forward Scotland call on the Scottish Government to ensure that evaluations of activities and initiatives it backs are carried out and successes are mainstreamed with appropriate levels of government support.

How will we get there

In terms of support for local food, Scotland is lagging behind and there is significant risk that we will not capitalise on the opportunity that local food presents. Without a greater strategic focus, co-ordination and support, the efforts of all those striving to bring local produce to the fore cannot be realised.

The sector in England seems further developed in part due to its larger scale but also as a result of the higher profile it has within the UK Government and the regions of England. The Big Lottery Fund in England and Wales has allocated over £60million to support a defined qualifying group of non-profit distributing organisations and activities for 'local food'.

In the same period an insignificant amount of funding has been allocated to a similar range of activities occurring across Scotland. Groups where they exist have had to manage a cocktail of funding from a diverse range of sources and many of these activities were put at risk due to the delays in public sector funding agreements during 2007/08.

Forward Scotland calls for the Scottish Government to ensure that financial support is available to non-profit distributing organisations and activities in Scotland that will build the infrastructure to expand access to locally sourced produce and develop the skills of people to produce, market and appreciate food.

CONCLUSION

The 2006 review the Scottish Diet Action Plan, where food issues were principally framed in a health context was honest and open. It revealed that Scotland has not become healthier during the last 10 years and consumption of many of the target 'healthy' foods is down, particularly in deprived areas. The review supported the 'obvious' benefits of local food for communities and perhaps if its call for strategic support is answered a contribution can be made from local food to Scotland's wider dietary and health goals.

Forward Scotland is very keen to continue working with national, its agencies and local Government to further sustainable development among communities. Our experience in coordinating a wide range of projects and identifying new approaches to foster thriving communities will support the Government's goal of pursuing sustainable economic growth.

It is clear that local food presents opportunities for progress towards a more sustainable society with its benefits to the local economy through support for local producers, it can provide viable long-term employment and maintain employment particularly in rural communities, and it can engage people in healthier lifestyles and reduce the carbon footprint of the food we consume.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to this discussion and we look forward to supporting the work of the Scottish Government in promoting sustainable development. We would be pleased to meet with you if clarification or further detail is required.

Frazer Scott

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