

A national food policy for Scotland – response to *Choosing the Right Ingredients: the future for food in Scotland* discussion paper from the Macaulay Institute

Food and drink are significant cross-cutting policy issues. The Macaulay Institute is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to this important question and the Scottish Government's discussion paper *Choosing the Right Ingredients*. The government's forthcoming draft national food policy will need to be grounded in a solid evidence-base and the Macaulay Institute's researchers are already working on the aspects of science which will help to inform such policy. Our current research priorities include: local responses to climate change; linking society and the environment; changing landscapes; managing water resources; assessing and enhancing soil quality and understanding biodiversity. These priorities are interlocking and are constructed to address the complex ecological, economic and social networks in Scotland. As such, they get at the heart of the key issues that a cross cutting initiative such as national food and drink policy will need to address.

The Scottish Government's national food discussion website asks: "Where should we be going? How might we get there? What do we need to do?" We respond to each of these questions below.

Where should a national food and drink policy be going? The Macaulay Institute believes that sustainability should be at the core of the national policy. Specifically, sustainable ecological, economic and social development goals should act as the guiding principles for the policy's development. The policy should:

1. Identify and encourage ways that food and drink production and consumption can help reduce the impacts of climate change and enrich rather than deplete Scotland's rich natural resources.
2. Continue to recognise the importance of the agro-food complex in wealth creation and wider development in rural Scotland.
3. Target opportunities to enhance small and local business development, especially in rural communities.
4. Pursue opportunities to enhance the social benefits of a more localised and sustainable food chain as well as create and strengthen links between rural and urban communities.

How might we get there? *Choosing the Right Ingredients* is a helpful framing document. It demonstrates a wide range of awareness about the broad spectrum of issues involved in the forthcoming food and drink policy. The Macaulay Institute applauds this initial effort and suggests that the next steps are to put flesh onto the bones of this framework by linking a national food and drink policy to existing policy and through targeted, joined-up, cross cutting initiatives that are linked to solid progress markers. A national food and drink policy should strengthen internal Scottish networks between food and drink producers, processors and consumers. These are the networks that will allow cross cutting policy to join-up across different sectors.

(1) In order to identify and encourage ways that food and drink production and consumption can help reduce the impacts of climate change and enhance Scotland's natural resource base:

- A national food and drink policy should be tied directly to the Scottish Government's Climate Change Bill targets of cutting emissions by 80% by 2050. This would mean encouraging more sustainable farming practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, reducing both transport distances as well as encouraging alternate methods of transportation, such as rail links from farm to processing and from processing to the consumer. Food accounts for approximately 20% of the ecological footprint of a household. It therefore

provides many tangible opportunities for improvement which the Scottish Government should encourage.

- A national food and drink policy should provide support to farmers to diversify their farm businesses, through a broader range of crop production or reducing the intensity of conventional agricultural inputs, in order to increase Scotland's natural resources including soils, water and biodiversity.
- A sustainable national food and drink policy needs to support retailers by providing an agreed definition of 'sustainable' and 'local' for food labelling. Consumers are becoming more concerned about issues of provenance and food miles and deserve better information with which to make purchasing decisions.
- Food and drink processors and retailers should be encouraged to:
 - Reduce packaging
 - Increase transport efficiencies
 - Include more Scottish seasonal produce when it is available
 - Choose edit their product lines to only the most sustainable options
 - Support 'fair trade' efforts for Scottish farmers as well as international farmers
 - Source and process produce within Scotland

This effort should be part of a larger move to relocalise the food economy, which not only provides positive ecological impacts it also increases the nation's food security.

- Food waste and packaging needs better management 'downstream' as well. The forthcoming policy should be linked to improved recycling targets for both.

(2) In order to recognise the importance of and give appropriate support to the agro-food complex in wealth creation and wider development in rural Scotland, a national food and drink policy should:

- Develop best practice guidelines and disseminate best practices within the food and drink industry in relation to training, hygiene, product development etc.
- Support initiatives and developments which add value to Scottish primary products, thereby ensuring the maximum benefit in employment and wealth creation to Scotland from the high quality products which Scotland is able to produce.
- Facilitate increased co-operation amongst farmers so that they may increase their market share and build a stronger position from which to negotiate with supermarkets.
- Support collaborative supply chain management with strategic public investment to ensure that there are good information flows and effective liaison among all actors along the food and drink supply chain.
- Support initiatives which nurture the 'up-scaling' of sustainable food supply chains/networks into mainstream food supply system.
- Work to address supermarkets' monopolistic practices in the food and drink retail sector including restricting the development of one supermarket towns.
- Learn from the experience of effective competitors in the red meat market such as New Zealand.

(3) In order to target opportunities to enhance small and local business development, especially in rural communities:

- A national food and drink policy should work with both Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to provide targeted funding for more Scottish food and drink processing (for example, more local abattoirs) in order to reduce the distance travelled by farmers' produce once it leaves the farm gate, where these can become viable. Such an effort would additionally create more jobs in local communities.
- The Scottish Government should set a good example of supply-chain reduction by moving towards a localised model of public procurement in government canteens, schools, hospitals and prisons. There is abundant evidence that such a goal can be pursued within EU

procurement guidelines by focussing on the values of seasonality and freshness. Such an effort would additionally support the growth of local business to serve the public sector.

- There should be improved efforts to connect locally produced high quality Scottish food and drink to the tourist sector. While there have been welcome improvements in the Scottish tourist's sector, all too often UK and overseas visitors are not presented with the exceptional quality ingredients which are on offer and which can add distinctiveness to the tourist experience.
- The policy should continue to support farmers' market links through additional direct to consumer sales opportunities (farm shops, farmer's markets etc.) as well as support farmers' skills growth by providing training opportunities in marketing and direct sales. Such an effort should support both green tourism goals as well as offer the potential for strengthened community ties and an increased number of rural jobs.
- We see the fostering of local food and drink networks as a way of rebuilding trust between consumers and producers, delivering a greater share of the retail pound to hard-pressed farmers and rebuilding a strong sense of place in Scottish rural communities. This should celebrate diversity and help to re-affirm place identities.
- We welcome the provisions in the Scottish Rural Development Programme to support better marketing and value adding opportunities.

(4) In order to pursue opportunities to enhance the social benefits of a more localised and sustainable food chain as well as create more and strengthen links between rural and urban communities:

- A national food and drink policy should encourage behaviour change at the individual level by increasing its commitment to community food initiatives which increase access to healthy food, teach preparation skills and link food and drink producers with local communities. This is an issue of both food culture and health and it requires a cultural change from pre-school onwards. The Scottish Government can boast a large number of innovative health, education and community programmes already, but these are isolated examples. These best practice models should be harnessed in order to mainstream successful programmes nationally and ensure longevity for the already operating programmes to continue providing community benefits.
- The new policy should encourage behaviour change at the community level and local governments can support this goal by reducing planning obstacles to innovative community projects, for example by increasing opportunities to repurpose brown field sites for community gardens or allotments. In addition, an increasingly localised and seasonal public procurement system, as advocated above, sets a good example by demonstrating that government is able to 'practice what it preaches'.
- The Scottish Government should make an even greater effort to elicit input from local communities as well as industry bodies when it comes to writing a final policy. The food and drink sector is the most important element in rural economies in areas like Moray, Dumfries and Galloway or Orkney. A food and drink policy matters to people and communities around Scotland and they should have an active role in its framing.

What do we need to do? The policy needs to create a framework for all of the departments across government to work together in order to join-up the cross cutting effort as well as to encourage support for food and drink policy initiatives from the top tier of each department right down through local delivery. Because food is also an international issue, the policy needs to identify where the national food and drink policy should be tied to UK and the EU policies and initiatives that will support Scotland's sustainable food and drink policy.

The research proposed in *Choosing the Right Ingredients* has missed acknowledging the place for social science research. The Scottish Government should be sure to include social science research

in its policy delivery plan. We consider that there is a continued and pressing need for a better research base on key triggers to dietary and other health-related behaviour changes and on the effectiveness of various initiatives and policies. The expansion of social research within the Food Standard's Agency's programme of research acknowledges this issue, but the specific Scottish challenges make this a pressing need within a Scottish food and drink policy.

A national food and drink policy needs to be accountable to be effective. The policy should set targets and ensure that these are linked to a specific timeline. These should be linked to impacts and other progress markers. Targets should also be tied to the existing evidence base as well as to a continuing programme of research. The Macaulay Institute offers its expertise in joining-up cross cutting issues through strategic research. This can yield a more holistic systems view which is necessary to understanding and improving the networks which tie Scottish food and drink to issues of land use, rural stewardship, health, wellbeing and positive environmental change.

The Macaulay Institute was founded in 1930 and has a history of interdisciplinary research across the environmental and social sciences, which aims to support the protection of natural resources, the creation of integrated land use systems, and the development of sustainable rural communities. Our mission is to be an international leader in research on the sustainable use of land and its natural resources for the benefit of people, their communities and the environment.