

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

1: Should the scope of the new food body extend beyond the current scope of the FSA in Scotland? If yes, what specific extensions of scope would you suggest, and why?

Comments Yes, considerably. Government & a new food body need to lead the change in food culture in Scotland. The most obvious route for this is through spreading a clear message. We think this must focus on improving food education and school meals for all children. We would also encourage a process of shifting the quality of meals served in all publicly funded places (schools/hospitals/prisons/sports centres, etc). The end goal would be to eventually shift our entire cultural attitude towards food, therefore improving things for everyone (health/confidence/ability/pride), and ensuring we enable the population to cook well for themselves. The FSA – or new body – should be the clearly identifiable food authority to oversee a clear message to attain this.

However, those looking at food safety and hygiene can't be the same people to put the 'sizzle' into the food message for Scotland (see final point no.16 from Carina Contini). But the two need to work hand in hand. The new body needs new input for the sizzle side. This part of the body would emphasize the equal importance of good quality food in terms of procurement, lack of processing, hygiene and nutritional values, with visual and taste appeal – and the sheer pleasure of producing and eating good food. Yet it must do this in an appealing, energetic way. This 'arm' of the new food body needs passionate people with a food service background to steer it.

The new food body should be the overarching overseer for both. It could also have teeth, in monitoring provision of food education and food provision in schools (or at least work in tandem with those that do), keeping abreast of all input, from Soil Association schemes to Adopt A Chef and 'Food Champion' programmes, as 3 examples, and collate good practise among councils/hospitals, etc. It needs a team to oversee and collate the work of these and other separate bodies. It would be seen as a go-to umbrella body for all those involved in good practise at a local level. At the moment there is a lot of good work going on but it is spread out and only in pockets, simply driven by those who happen to be passionate about a local cause. The new food body could co-ordinate the good work so that it reaches all areas.

In schools, the Menteith Group's idea is to create a similar system to Active Scotland, eg Active Food, which would employ teaching teams in each council, trained to teach food education in schools, clearly linked to meal provision, and using school kitchens as classrooms and working directly with meal providers and staff. Eating in schools should not be separate from education. They should be clearly linked.

2: Should the new food body and the Scottish Government continue the arrangements for independent and partnership work on diet and nutrition set out in Annex A? If not, what changes would you suggest, and why?

Comments We are not experts on govt mechanisms. However, it seems obvious that the NHS should have a role in contributing to FSA reports and work on diet and nutrition and that the government's public health duties should combine with an independent FSA to get the right messages out. Two problems seem to be, a) Getting the message out: govt bodies are very good at producing reams of information, but the advice is often not put into

practise, eg in actual food given to children, the elderly and hospital patients. And b) Presenting a cohesive message, eg from the FSA/Govt/NHS. So, yes, they should continue to work independently and in partnership to achieve the best possible outcomes for the general health of the population.

3: Are there any additional roles, responsibilities or functions in respect of diet and nutrition that you think the new food body could take on to help deliver an improvement to the health of the people in Scotland? Please give details and reasons.

Comments As mentioned, a clear message is imperative. And concentrating on food education and meals for children is key. We need a monitored approach to children's meals in schools (and hospitals, etc) and food education. The Menteith Group could help formulate a clear food message.

It won't work if the govt does the opposite, however, eg allowing schools/hospitals to be built with limited catering equipment and facilities. The cost of this is the health of our population. Scotland can truly be the land of food and drink, and has done brilliantly at promoting its natural larder, particularly in terms of business and exports, but needs to join up its approach in terms of what we think is good enough to feed our children and others in public facilities.

We think a change in Scottish culture towards good diet and nutrition can only work with actual classroom work with children, involving a clear message (ie trained teachers) and actual cooking. And this means again, teaching and offering the 'sizzle' factor, not simply food that ticks nutritional boxes, but can still be a dry piece of pizza and a few dribbles of canned sweetcorn.

Part of the sea change needed in meal provision is retraining cooks – in schools/prisons/hospitals, etc. Many have become so used to 'heating' food, that basic cooking skills are being lost, or considered too much work. There is good work on this front in some areas, and poor practise in others. Sharing good practise – and actual training are needed, as well as markable higher standards.

4: What steps do you think could be taken to ensure the new food body is able to access the best available independent expert advice it needs to underpin its work on food safety and public health nutrition in Scotland? Please give reasons.

Comments

This is obviously critical. However grants must be allocated on the back of adequate research into appropriate bodies. There may be a tendency to hand over stewardship of projects too readily. We would like to see food projects happening in every school, not just in certain areas.

The Menteith Group is fairly new, and we have discovered in a short time that there is a plethora of food groups doing excellent work in pockets of the country, but what is needed is an overview. The FSA should appoint a visible team to collate all the information from all available groups. This not only makes the groups accountable, but forms a single source of information and good practise.

A simple example of this would be to list every single school in Scotland, and outline how many home ec teachers there are, what percentage takes school meals, whether meals are cooked on the premises and what projects they sign up to (eg Food for Life Awards from the Soil Association – or a cooking club from Children's Food Trust).

This sharing of good practise and adequate research into those awarded grants must also be the case for

sourcing advice on food safety and public health.

5: Do you consider that the new food body should focus its research and surveillance activities on issues that are particularly pertinent to Scottish citizens or should it also contribute to science and evidence programmes on wider issues which have relevance to the UK as a whole? Please give reasons.

- **Comments** The priority should be for the health of Scottish citizens, but working on wider issues or with other bodies in the UK will no doubt broaden its knowledge and research base.

6: Do you agree that the new food body should be responsible for the coordination of all Scottish Government funded research on food safety and public health nutrition? What steps could be taken to raise the profile of the new food body as a research funder across the UK and beyond? Please give reasons.

- **Comments** Yes. This seems an answer for those involved in research and funding. One question that arises is how would the funding be generated for issues of Scottish health and beyond?
- The way to raise the profile is employ good people to do the PR!

7: Do you have any further suggestions for how the new food body could establish a strong independent evidence base for food safety, food standards and nutrition policy? Please give reasons.

- **Comments** By co-ordinating work being done across the country, and effectively monitoring work done. Also by venturing to countries that do well in this area, eg Finland (one Menteith Group member, Dave Payne, is organising a visit to Finland soon to see how school meals work there).
- Finally by restructuring food education, as specified earlier, and assessing how this improves matters, as it has done in the Active Schools programme.
- The monitoring of food standards is a key area. As has been shown in one highly publicised case of school meals, the complaints system did not work effectively. So, despite worldwide attention, the meals have not changed. At this point, there need to be teeth in place to ensure standards can be raised – and communication kept open, not simply stubborn opposition.

8: Do you consider that the new food body would require any further statutory powers, in addition to those that the FSA already has, to equip it to deal effectively with incidents such as the recent horse meat substitutions, and to prevent such incidents happening? Please give reasons.

- **Comments** It would need good teeth, for example the ability to prosecute.

9: Do you have any further comments about how the new food body might ensure that it can deal effectively with contraventions of food standards and safety law? Please give reasons.

- Comments No further comment.

10: Should the new food body take on any roles and responsibilities not currently fulfilled by the FSA in Scotland? If yes, please give details and reasons.

- Comments As already specified. In general, it should become an umbrella body for all the small operators doing good work with food, to look towards, and a place to share practise.
- And as mentioned, should be a partner with govt's education department and councils to oversee good food education and school meals.
- Wherever there is food in a govt department (education/health & hospitals/ prisons), the new food body should have input.
- With a single clear message this should be simpler than it sounds.
- However, as Nick emphasised when meeting Karen McCallum Smith, it will not be an easy task overall, and will have to tread carefully not to appear hectoring and bossy. This means it must think carefully about who is fronting the new 'sizzle' side of the food body.

11: Please tell us your views about these suggestions for changes to the delivery of official food and feed controls. Do you think that the new food body should work in a different way with local authorities? Please give reasons.

- Comments No comment

12: Do you have any views on how the new food body should assure delivery of official controls and meet the relevant EU obligations? Please give reasons.

- Comments No comment

13: Are there any additional or alternative relationships that you would suggest that would help the new food body achieve the Scottish Ministers' objective of longer, healthier lives for the people of Scotland? Please give details and reasons.

Comments Again, by linking very strongly with education. Not relying on smallpiece ideas, but co-ordinating a strong strategy for meals (school/hospitals) and education to bring up a new generation with informed ideas about good food and diet. Again assessment of all charities and campaigning groups and work they're doing.

-

14: Do you have any suggestions about how the new food body can engage effectively with consumers, both in developing policy and providing information and advice?

Comments Fewer leaflets, more action. Training and workshops for food outlets, food providers led by experts to improve not just nutritional content of food but general standard 'sizzle' in the food we eat.

There should never be another patient in hospital who has to complain about the food.

-

15: Do you agree with the suggested approach to ensuring the new food body's independence from Government and the food industry? Do you have any further suggestions for how the new food body could best establish and maintain its position as an arms length part of Government? Please give reasons.

- **Comments** By operating with complete transparency.

16: Do you have any further comments, or suggestions, on the creation of a new food body for Scotland that are not covered by any of the previous questions?

- **Comments** The problems the Menteith Group have identified are the patchiness of good food provision in schools and in food education for children. We believe what is needed is an overarching body to oversee good food provision for all, in schools and in other government run services, eg hospitals.
- This requires investment, eg proper production facilities, a single price for meals across the country, and accountability when things aren't up to scratch. It requires ensuring all councils meet a high standard of food provision. These new higher standards, together with a clear message need to be set and adhered to. Work needs to be done in conjunction with councils and schools.
- We believe the new food body needs to look after not only the nutrition, hygiene and safety of the food we eat, but also the 'sizzle' factor. This means that as well as ticking boxes for nutrition and safety, our food must achieve a general higher standard, beginning with school meals. This needs a new team and an effective method of spreading the word.
- One method would be to copy the format of Active Scotland and implement trained teachers and teams in each council to monitor and deliver food education and work with existing food providers to incorporate the kitchen into the classroom.
- The final and perhaps most relevant comment comes from a Menteith Group member Carina Contini, who says in her own words: **My only comment would be, and forgive me if it is very flippant but the whole joy of what we all do every day is completely hidden from this document. We need to teach people to love food. Love and respect good, clean, fair food and everything will fall into place.**

How are the people that have to deal with these documents inspired to create a better awareness of eating healthily. That would be my challenge to them. I would almost suggest that it takes two strands. All the technical, legal, compliance stuff and then the fun, knowledge, engagement exciting stuff. If you drown the good stuff then it will never surface.'