

Agenda Item	5
Report No	CCWG/10/21

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Climate Change Working Group

Date: 20th October 2021

Report Title: Council Response to the Scottish Government's Local Food Strategy Consultation

Report By: Executive Chief Officer – Communities and Place

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Scottish Government are currently consulting on their Local Food Strategy. This considers how to make high quality food accessible to the whole population and promote the benefits of local food. This report sets out the Council's draft response to the consultation.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
- i. Discuss and provide commentary on the contents of the Council's response.
 - ii. Agree a final response to the consultation to be submitted to the Scottish Government.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource – there are no resource implications arising from this paper
- 3.2 Legal – the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 places a requirement on the Council in relation to producing a community food growing strategy and provision of allotment and food growing space. The Council's strategy will be considered by this Working Group later this year. The Scottish Government's local food strategy may lead to future duties for the Council.
- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island) – there are no direct community implications arising from this paper. However, issuing this response demonstrates our commitment to local food and the positive benefits that increased local food production

and consumption brings to the community including; improved diets, support to smaller scale agriculture and community growing initiatives in Highland. There are elements of the Government's local food strategy which will inform the Council's Food Growing Strategy.

- 3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever – there are no direct climate change implications arising from issuing this consultation response. However, increased support for local food through the Scottish Government local food strategy will benefit the climate by promoting more sustainable food production methods, shorter food supply chains and fewer food miles.
- 3.5 Risk – as the local food agenda grows there will likely be pressure on the Council to take action which may require additional resources to meet the commitments.
- 3.6 Gaelic – there are no Gaelic implications arising from this report

4. Background

- 4.1 This consultation from the Scottish Government is the first stage in a strategy to make high quality food accessible to all and promote the benefits of local food.
- 4.2 The Scottish Government aims to start a conversation about local food in Scotland, inviting contributions about how everyone involved in food in Scotland could work together to build a food system based around quality local production and short and circular supply chains, to make high quality Scottish produce available to all.
- 4.3 This paper briefly summarises the consultation and provides a draft response at **Appendix 1**.

5. Consultation Summary - Local Food for Everyone

- 5.1 The consultation aims to start a conversation about local food in Scotland and invites contributions about how people can get involved. The aim is to build a more local food system to make high quality produce available to all.
- 5.2 The consultation begins by defining local food and seeks views on this definition and the potential benefits of this approach but also any potential disadvantages:
 - it is produced locally (this includes your town, region or elsewhere in Scotland)
 - it has short supply chains (there are fewer steps between the primary producer of the food and the person who eats the food)
 - it is sustainably produced (i.e. produced in a way that is better for the natural environment than large scale industrial production)
 - it is produced in a way that places an emphasis on building better relationships of trust, information, fairness and support between local food producers and the people buying and eating their food.
- 5.3 The consultation also presents the three pillars of the Scottish Government's local food strategy and seeks views on these:

- **connecting people with food**; making land available for growing, community food growing, learning about food, improving access to local food
- **connecting Scottish producers with buyers**; faster and shorter supply chains, encourage retailers to stock Scottish food, encourage consumers to buy Scottish food, encourage use of Scottish products in supply chains
- **harnessing public sector procurement**; leverage public sector buying power to support Scottish producers, better access to public sector procurement for local food producers

5.4 The consultation specifically seeks views from public sector organisations on potential improvements to the accessibility of local food and the provision of local food in public institutions e.g. schools and hospitals. The consultation also seeks views on learning from Covid in relation to local food but also examples of good practice in relation to local food provision.

5.5 The second part of the consultation explores the concept of vertical farming, a technology which may be able to help Scotland increase its local food production and bring food production closer to the consumer. It seeks views on the use, benefits and barriers of this technology.

6. Draft Council Response

6.1 The Council's proposed response has been drafted by officers from Community Support and Engagement, Climate Change and Energy, Catering Services, Procurement, Revenues and Business Support, and informed by responses from the Highland Good Food Partnership's (HGFP) community consultation.

6.2 The consultation considers the definition and the benefits of local food and asks for comments regarding disadvantages of local food. The draft response agrees in large part with the consultation document's definitions and benefits of local food. However, the response adds some suggested further details around environmental, educational and community benefits, geography and the specific needs of remote areas. The draft response recognises that affordability of local food is currently a disadvantage and challenges the Scottish Government strategy to go further in its commitment to reduce the barriers to local food for those on low incomes or experiencing food insecurity.

6.3 As noted in section 5, the Scottish Government structures its action on local food around three pillars and asks for comments on their actions under these pillars. The key points of the proposed response, relevant to each pillar, are:

Connecting people with food

- Financial support for community food growing:
Support to local authorities to be able to provide staff posts and funding to enable local food initiatives in the community, as well as making it easier for local authorities to reduce costs to groups who require planning permission.
- Support for food education:
Redrafting of the 2014 Better Eating, Better Learning guidance, enable education to link more closely with catering services, agreement with the aim to make food education an integral part of the national curriculum, and suggestion that food waste education be included in the strategy actions.

- Making land available for growing:
Agreement with the work being done through Community Wealth Building and the Community Empowerment Act, highlighting that land reform could consider how better access to land for food growing could be enabled.

Connecting Scottish producers with buyers

- Diversifying farming outputs in Highland:
Support to farmers to diversify the use of land to meet local needs in balance with export needs and incentivisation of local food production using agriculture funding models.
- Improved local processing facilities:
Highlighting the reduction in the number of abattoirs in Highland from 11 to 1 since 2006 and the impact for meat producers.
- Models of access to local food:
Levers for local authorities to better enable farms shops and in town purchasing options for local food, reference to models in other countries that could aid our development of better supply models and highlighting that the affordability of local food is not currently but could be considered in this strategy.

Harnessing public sector procurement

- Straightforward procurement processes:
Support to public sector to streamline procurement processes that enable local suppliers to provide local food and highlighting the need for this work on local food to work in tandem with education so that young people can forge futures in local food production.

- 6.4 The consultation asks for further comments on how the strategy could reduce disadvantage, to which our key comments are on supporting food providers to supply local food in emergency food provision.
- 6.5 The consultation asks for good examples of public sector work on local food, community food response during Covid, and organisations working to improve local food. The Council's response highlights a few select examples from Highland including schools who are delivering exemplary food growing and education projects, community food growing projects that have linked with emergency food provision during the Covid response and local groups who are promoting local food and who are forming strong networks across Highland. The response notes that these are examples to illustrate the type of work in Highland and that there are many additional examples.
- 6.6 The final part of the consultation asks specifically about vertical farming technologies. This section is aimed primarily at people and business within the food supply chain and therefore only certain questions have been responded to utilising feedback through the Highland Good Food Partnership.

7.0 Next Steps

- 7.1 The Council's own community food growing strategy, Growing Our Future, is currently being finalised, taking into account the consultation feedback from earlier this year, the learning from the pandemic and recent community and partner engagement. The draft

strategy will be presented to Members for consideration at the next meeting of the Climate Change Working Group.

- 7.2 If agreed by the Working Group, the Council's response to the Scottish Government's local food strategy consultation will be submitted ahead of the 26th November 2021 deadline.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer – Communities and Place

Date: 13th October 2021

Author: Kirsty Ellen, Community Food Growing Coordinator

Draft response to the Scottish Government Local Food Strategy Consultation

Consultation documents:

- Consultation background: <https://www.gov.scot/isbn/9781802012392>
- Consultation Questions: <https://consult.gov.scot/agriculture-and-rural-economy/local-food-for-everyone>

Part A - Local food: introduction

1. Do you agree with the Scottish Government definition of local food as set out above?

Yes

Comments

Yes, the Council on the whole agrees with the definition. However, it would be useful to add specific reference to food grown through more informal means such as community food growing, sharing schemes and other non-business related means.

Benefits of local food

2. Do you agree with the benefits associated with local food as set out in the strategy?

Agree with some but not all of the benefits

Comments

Environmental benefits should also include a lower carbon footprint for food. Although probably out with the scope of a local food strategy, it would be useful to begin to quantify the embedded carbon footprint through packaging in order to increase the public's carbon literacy – a scheme along the lines of the red, amber and green used to highlight levels of salt, sugar and fat could help enable consumers to make more informed choices about the food they consume, which would naturally lend itself to increased purchase of local food given its footprint is often much lower than imported foodstuffs.

It is suggested that the Scottish Government could be bolder in respect of this agenda. Increased production and consumption of local food is imperative if Scotland is to achieve a net zero, climate-ready, resilient, healthy, society with everyone having access to good food. The Highland Council, through signing the Glasgow food and climate declaration, has recognised that taking a food systems approach has multiple benefits, but will likely need some support from Scottish Government in order to maximise these.

The explanation of 'geography and the specific needs of remote areas' gives the impression that the cost of a 'breadbasket' can be reduced simply by eliminating transport costs, but this would need consistent supply from local farmers and other suppliers to wholesalers, supermarkets and other retail outlets as mentioned above.

The Council agrees with 'reducing barriers to food' as a benefit, however there are not enough specifics about this following through in the rest of the strategy to provide confidence that Scottish Government has a plan in respect of how to reduce these - in particular, linking to affordability and strengthening tackling food insecurity. There is also a benefit arising from local food production in respect of education. More local food and connection between small local producers and community growing groups, and schools will result in increased opportunities for children to learn about food from their local farms and communities and strengthen the work schools do on growing and healthy eating.

A sense of community cohesion, resilience and connection to place are also benefits of local food. Having local knowledge around food, farms and community growing spaces, and being able to access these places, contributes to our sense of connection to the place where we live and builds our local food culture. Community members also share this knowledge with each other socially and intergenerationally, which contributes to our sense of community cohesion. Relationships are built through community food projects that contributes to resilience.

3. Are you aware of any disadvantages of local food?

Yes

Comments

There is a cost premium for a lot of local produce, and this can preclude many low-income families from purchasing. Local food is often not available to buy in town centre locations or in supermarkets, and is therefore not accessible to many, particularly those without transport links or the time to seek it out. However, this could be aided through this strategy if bigger retailers were encouraged / incentivised to supply local food and local farmers markets were better supported. Local production does not always mean more affordable, labels such as 'produced on an island' or items with protected designation of origin status are generally more expensive. An increase in community and personal growing help make food affordable but will not meet all needs.

Another perceived disadvantage of local food is the inability to grow certain fruit and vegetables (e.g. tomatoes/ peppers / asparagus etc), which are seen as staples, year-round. This obviously leads to demand for these foods to be met by supply from other countries, often with an extremely high carbon footprint due to the perishability of specific items and the need to air-freight them in. There is therefore a need to better educate people about what can be done with locally produced, in-season produce to meet nutritional requirements, whilst it would also be sensible to explore regional opportunities and economic levers to enable more glass houses / vertical farming for the production of year-round crops.

Scottish Government activity

4. Do you have any comments on the first pillar of the Scottish Government's local food strategy: connecting people with food?

Comments

Financial support for community food growing:

Financial support to Local Authorities to enable local food and support to local growers is vital. The Highland Council are committed to our community food growing strategy and in providing support to the allotments and community growing projects in Highland and have created a time-limited staff post to do this. However, many Local Authorities have not been in a position to fund a staff post, even on a temporary basis.

The amount of money currently committed to support community food growing/grow your own is very small - it is largely incumbent on each local authority to identify revenue and capital funding from already stretched budgets to support this agenda, which necessarily limits its reach or shifts the burden onto communities / the third sector.

Community groups can incur fees, which can be a barrier when setting up community food growing projects and allotments, including when gaining planning permission. If the Town and Country Planning Regulations were to include exemptions on fees for community groups, it would make planning applications for community food growing easier to obtain.

Support for food education:

In the context of school food, a revisit and redrafting of the 2014 guidance, Better Eating, Better Learning would be of huge benefit to all Education links. Use of the new Education Scotland Food in Schools self-evaluation document, could greatly support education linking more closely with catering services within local authorities to increase the food education opportunities available through school food.

The Council agrees that learning about food is essential and are supportive of this strategy's aim to make food education an integral part of the national education curriculum. It is important that we grow and nurture the next generation of farmers, growers and producers and food is such an important part of all children's health and wellbeing. We need children growing, preparing and cooking in school from age 5, all the way through the system. In the way that PE is essential, so should food education.

There is a critical link when connecting people with food to help them understand how to reduce waste. Reducing food waste is mentioned as a benefit of local food, but more could be included within this strategy to enable food waste reduction schemes and community composting to make waste reduction and education a focus of action coming out of this strategy.

Making land available for growing

The Council is supportive of both the Community Wealth Building strategy and Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act and welcomes the role that both will play in enabling communities to access land for food growing. There is however still more to be done with wider land reform, and the issues that exist within Highland for our

distribution of land ownership and the knock-on impact for local people having access to land to better enable more local food growing to meet increasing demand.

5. Do you have any comments on the second pillar of the Scottish Government's local food strategy: connecting Scottish producers with buyers?

Comments

Diversifying farming outputs in Highland

The Council welcomes the Local Food Strategy and the recognition that greater support is required to help farmers to grow more produce that meets the needs of local people. At present, the focus of the Scottish food and drink industry is largely on exports and driven by market forces - this severely limits the local food sector as much of the fertile land we have in Highland is used for the production of barley, mainly for the malt whisky industry. Whilst this is a critical industry in respect of the economic health and prosperity of Scotland, if the local food agenda is to be successful, a better balance must be struck between the needs of the export market, and the needs of local communities for access to locally produced food. Other countries with similar geography to us grow extremely varied selections of fruit and vegetables. As an aside, the Highland Good Food Partnership has applied to the Scottish Government for funding to support a Scotland/Scandinavian food learning exchange, with the idea to showcase to politicians and policy makers what is possible here.

Local food production could be better incentivised through agriculture funding models. This may be most relevant for the Scottish Government Agriculture Transition policy consultation, however both strategies have a connectedness and should enable each other to support local food production.

Improved local processing facilities

There are limited local processing facilities in the Highlands. The number of Highland abattoirs has reduced from 11 to 1 since 2006. Regulations around abattoirs etc are prohibitive and have discouraged many local operators, which also has a knock-on impact on local meat production and consumption, thus having a drastic effect on the carbon intensity of meat consumed.

Models of access to local food

The Council supports the work already being done to enable regional food groups and the Highlands are now benefitting from coordination support to the Highland Good Food Partnership.

The Council welcomes the actions to encourage retailers to stock local food and encourage customers to buy Scottish food. However, the affordability of local food remains a barrier that has not been considered in this strategy.

More could be actioned to increase the number of farm shops including levers for local authorities to better enable these within towns so that people do not require to travel to access them.

Demand significantly exceeds supply - local people generally want to buy local food. It is important to examine and learn from models of cooperatives in other countries

like Germany, France, the Netherlands and Scandinavia to fully realise what is possible here.

6. Do you have any comments on the third pillar of the Scottish Governments local food strategy: harnessing public sector procurement?

Comments

Straightforward procurement processes

Making the procurement process more streamlined to encourage and enable local suppliers to provide local food is critical and having this as a dedicated pillar of the strategy is to be welcomed. This will also directly support the community wealth building agenda but needs to work in tandem with local education providers to ensure that young people have the ability to develop skills and business acumen to enable them to forge futures in local food production. Community benefit provisions through public sector procurements could be a useful mechanism to enable this.

7. Are there any areas related to local food where Scottish Government involvement could bring further benefits or reduce disadvantages?

Comments

Support emergency food provision with local food and community food projects:

Enable local food to contribute to emergency food provision, making fresh food more available to people experiencing food insecurity. Financial support and guidance to local authorities and community groups who are responding to food insecurity on an ongoing basis, so that more local food can be purchased. Increased financial support for community food projects that work with vulnerable groups and aim to reduce inequalities.

Skip Questions 8-13 for individuals only

Local food: access and public sector food questions

14. Do you have any further comments on improvements that could be made to allow for everyone living in Scotland to have better access to healthy, affordable and locally sourced food?

Comments

Access to land is a significant challenge and land reform is imperative – whilst it is out-with the scope of the Local Food Strategy, the Council will watch with interest in respect of how NPF4 will seek to address this issue.

15. Do you think that Scotland's schools, hospitals and other public institutions provide sufficient access to healthy, locally sourced food?

Somewhat

Comments

The strategy focusses on school procurement but doesn't sufficiently cover other areas of public sector procurement, which make up a significant proportion of spend and is therefore a missed opportunity.

16. Are you aware of any examples of schools, hospitals or other public institutions that have been particularly effective in providing healthy, locally sourced food?

Yes

Comments

Nairn Academy, through partnership working with the Farmer Jones Academy and local groups Green Hive and the Nairn Allotments Society, created a school kitchen garden, orchard and school cafe, and have implemented new curricular activities in food growing and preparation.

Tarradale Primary school work in partnership with MOO Food to proactively embed food education (growing, preparing, cooking and sharing) throughout the whole school, from the pupils and teaching staff to families and the wider community. By working together they are literally growing their future.

Inverness High School have almost an acre of the school grounds used as a school food garden and outdoor classroom. They work on increasing biodiversity through wildflower, fruit growing and wildlife habitat zones, maintaining small scale crop and food production for educational purposes, developing practical gardening and maintenance skills with the pupils and developing enterprise skills through the sale of school farm produce and products. IHS were the first school in Scotland to build their own wood fired clay pizza oven!

Local food: Covid-19 questions

17. Has your attitude to local food changed at all due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and related restrictions?

Yes

Attitudes around using local food and community grown food in emergency food provision have been changing. Community groups working on emergency food provision have increased in Highland and some have been growing, or working with growing projects, to add local fresh food supply to emergency provision. We see this as a developing area of work for our community food groups, and the Council aims to support them through our community food growing strategy.

People are far more aware of the fragility of supply chains and therefore have greater interest in the availability of locally provided food; more interest in self-sufficiency or at least growing some of what is required; more awareness of the real cost of food - both financial and environmental; greater understanding of food inequality – ability to pay / access to IT for internet shopping and a greater desire to reduce food waste.

18. Are you aware of any organisations or schemes that have been particularly effective in providing local food during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Inverness Botanic Gardens' partnership with Inverness Foodstuff and the Crown Cupboard food larder. The Botanics adapted their glass house growing operations from growing plants for Council flower beds to growing food for the local foodbank and larder during the first wave of the pandemic, the partnerships are ongoing and developing. They are also providing vegetable seedlings to local charities who are growing veg with vulnerable children and people in poor health.

Caol & Lochyside Resilience Group in Lochaber provided food via delivery and collection points. They established a food larder; developed a community hub with drop-in; swap shop and donations for people to access books, toys etc (all appropriately sterilised); provided colouring packs for children and also bird-feeders for people's gardens to improve mental well-being and they also ran a helpline / Facebook facility.

Thurso Community Development Trust took over a redundant community garden in 2019, and with funding from the Climate Challenge Fund, set up a group called Thurso Grows. During the 2020 lockdown, Thurso Grows also temporarily took over a large Council-owned garden in the town centre, usually used for flower displays, and used this as a site to grow extra food for the community during the pandemic. Some of the produce was used to make the community meals which were delivered during lockdown, while the rest was free for residents to help themselves.

Local food: examples of good practice questions

19. Are you aware of any organisations or schemes that have been particularly effective in developing a strong sense of local food culture and community?

Highland Good Food Partnership has formed during 2020/21 to connect local food producers, growers, community groups and those with an interest in food across the region, to promote a positive local food culture and improve our food community's connections.

Nairn BID coordinate local street markets in Nairn's high street which bring local producers closer to their local customers. The markets have a good sense of community and promote better use of the high street in general.

20. Are you aware of any organisations or schemes that have been particularly effective in reducing the distance that food travels from being grown or produced to being eaten (the number of 'food miles' travelled)?

The Tain Community Market includes a number of local food suppliers which are very popular and this both raises awareness of local food (e.g. bread and cheeses) and reduces the distance food travels.

21. Are you aware of any organisations or schemes that have been particularly effective in the increasing availability of locally produced food?

The Seaboard Polytunnel group, Balintore, formed in 2017 and acquired an area of land for a community polytunnel in 2018 from the Highland Council via a community asset transfer request. They put up a polytunnel and started their growing project which is now well established and very successful. The group used some of the food grown in the poly tunnel to add into local food boxes provided by the local Seaboard Community Hall to local families in need. They liaised with a local farmer who provided 20 tons of potatoes and 90 dozen eggs as well as carrots and onions all for use in local food boxes. They have a table outside the poly tunnel with available veg etc for payment or donation - this also means those with very little money can take items and only put in a very small sum. They put out, for example, small cups of baby tomatoes to encourage children to try. This also encourages conversations about how to grow the produce. The growing of different types of potatoes has also sparked interest and engagement – all encouraging interest in local food – the Pentland Javelin potatoes are proving particularly popular with some of the older residents.

Thurso Grows have completely transformed a redundant community garden based in a deprived area of the town. They produce organic fruit and veg which is freely available to the local community and is also sold at local markets for donations. They host regular volunteer sessions, and work with groups throughout Caithness to help with growing skills, home composting and food waste reduction. They also run Thurso Eats, which hosts weekly workshops making a meal together, which they then eat as a group, aimed at reducing food waste, eating locally produced food and bringing people together. The next step for the Thurso Grows project, is for the Trust to secure a Community Asset Transfer of the Thurso Greenhouses Complex from Highland Council to form a local commercial growing facility. This facility will specialise in the supply of vegetables, plants and trees to local hospitality businesses, community growing projects and the wider public and provide an additional events space for workshops and events.

Part B - Vertical farming: introduction

22. Have you considered using vertical farming technologies?

Please comment on the above choice and explain reasoning
No Comments

23. What effect would increased usage of vertical farming have on food imports to Scotland?

No Comments

24. Would vertical farming cause an increase, decrease or have no effect on the following concerns compared with conventional production?

Comments

The focus on vertical farming in this strategy doesn't seem so appropriate for the Highlands and is more of a focus for central belt and highly populated areas.

25. What barriers do you see to the uptake of vertical farming in Scotland?

No Comments

26. Are you aware of any other technologies, other than vertical farming, which would help Scotland produce more of its own food?

Yes

Comments

Permaculture and restorative models of land management that are not so resource intensive and are better for the environment and nutritional value of the food produced.

The use of aquaponics can increase produce using sustainable techniques, resulting in both fish and plants produced from the same glasshouse without using a high consumption of water, fertilisers or outputting high levels of ammonia. There is an award-winning example of aquaponics at Alladale Estate, Highland, which plans to expand to four social enterprise projects across Highland in partnership with the Farmer Jones Academy.

There is also an example of a long-established hydroponics growing site at Achiltibuie in Highland.