

Scotland's Food in Scotland's Hands

Thursday 23rd November, 2017

How can we put Scotland's food into Scotland's hands? How can we take control of our food system? These are the questions that brought food producers, health workers, campaigners, community groups, and others together on a winter day in November 2017.

Our food should be at the heart of our culture, a source of health and wellbeing, something that brings us into connection with the environment around us, and is enjoyed equally by all members of society.

At the gathering we took one more step on this path, joining the dots with people passionate about community growing, marine life, public health, worker rights, wildlife, climate change, and much more, coming together to say we need to sort out our food system.



The Scottish Food Coalition (SFC) organised the gathering, and has been working together for the past two years. With a primary focus on political advocacy for a just transition to a better food system, the SFC was instrumental in securing a cross-party commitment to new legislation for the food system – the Good Food Nation Bill.

That is why building better connections within the Scottish food movement, moving towards a powerful, coordinated and politicized social movement, is more important than ever. The Good Food Nation Bill is due out for consultation in early 2018. It won't be an easy task, but we have the opportunity to establish some principles in law, which bring greater social and environmental justice to our food system. This gathering brought together a diverse array of the Scottish food movement to think about how to make the most of this opportunity. In the room there was a real drive not only to work on changing the food system in our own lives and communities, but also to figure out together how we want to structure and govern our food system at different levels.

Setting the scene

Scotland's Food in Scotland's Hands began with presentations from Pete Ritchie (Nourish Scotland) and Vicki Swales (RSPB Scotland) who are co-conveners of the Scottish Food Coalition.

Pete outlined the problem we are trying to solve: the UK has the highest proportion of children that are food insecure in Europe; we've got a toxic haze of chemicals covering our land, decimating insect populations; we can't address climate change without transforming the food system.

Vicki outlined some background of the Coalition – our intention to work together to take a systemic approach to these challenges, rather than address them in siloes.



Following the initial presentations, we had wide-reaching table discussions. Some of the questions that came up were:

- How do we reach wider audience, when there is little mainstream acknowledgement that the food system is broken?
- How do we maximise the potential of food to be a vehicle for wider social transformation?
- How do we create governance structures that can be representative and address inequalities of power?
- How do we communicate the urgency of the problem without using disengaging 'doom and gloom' language.

Food in a New Scotland

The first panel session – Food in a New Scotland – brought a focus on food as part of the wider context of Scotland's future. Demonstrating that in some ways, the future is already here, and in other ways it's going to look very different.

Peter McColl, Head of Policy for Scotland at NESTA, linked the mission for a food system fit for purpose, to the wider context of fast-paced technological developments and the potential for a very different future. He articulated that the priorities in a post-automation economy will be Care, Creativity and Collective decision-making, and painted a picture of a future food system with more jobs that people enjoyed, with the hard, boring labour undertaken by robots.

Lilian Macer, Scottish Convener for Unison, shared her background of working in NHS catering services and now part of a health board where she witnesses first-hand the impact of privatisation of services. She spoke of the imperative to value the profession of food and the dangers of outsourcing public food to private companies. We lose control, we lose quality, and we suffer the consequences when we cut corners with food. Valuing food skills and protecting worker rights would benefit all of us.

Wilma Findley from Cream o' Galloway, a radically different dairy farm, with animal welfare and ecology at its heart, spoke about her motivation for doing things differently: climate change. At Cream o' Galloway calves are left with their mothers for longer, this means that the farm gets less of the milk, but also reduces inputs of feed and makes for much healthier animals. They've done the calculations and produce 80% more net benefit to the human food supply this way - making the most of resources that humans can't eat to produce delicious cheese and ice cream.

Tom Kirby, who is a community gardener in Granton - place of 'multiple bad statistics' spoke of the changes in his local area and the people around him that had come through digging up the grassy street corners and planting lots of vegetables. People who were born from all over the world now call Granton their home, and getting together to look after the soil and share meals has brought a different sense of belonging. Tom posed a question 'who do you eat with?' and propositioned that a Good Food Nation means eating with more different people. Food is never culturally neutral, and our culture has shaped the way we do food today, just as much as the way we do food today has shaped our culture.

Photos: Cream o' Galloway cows and cheese;
Granton community meals, Nov '17.



Skype with Diana Bronson

Diana Bronson is Director of Food Secure Canada, and has been involved with the civil society demand for - and development of - a national food policy. The parallels between the movement in Canada, and what we are trying to build over here, were pronounced. Canadian civil society collectively produced the 'People's Food Policy' between 2008-2011, drawing on input from hundreds of 'Kitchen Table Talks' across the country - people getting together to discuss what they would like from food policy.

During the 2015 elections Food Secure Canada ran an 'Eat. Think. Vote' campaign, a series of community organised meals where local candidates and the voters would 'come to the table' and discuss the food issues Canada needs to act on now - leading to a commitment for a National Food Policy.



Despite so much civil society engagement, the policy is currently progressing behind closed doors. Food Secure Canada are fighting for a seat at the table.

Diana ended with some encouraging words - the power of unlikely allies! As well as an invitation to continue to work together for food justice - for the people, by the people.

Lunch provided by Bespoke Organic Events



We enjoyed a delicious lunch, of veggie stew, salads, cheese and bread. Sourced from some of Scotland's best organic producers, including East Coast Organics, Meadowsweet Organics, Green City and Bread Share.



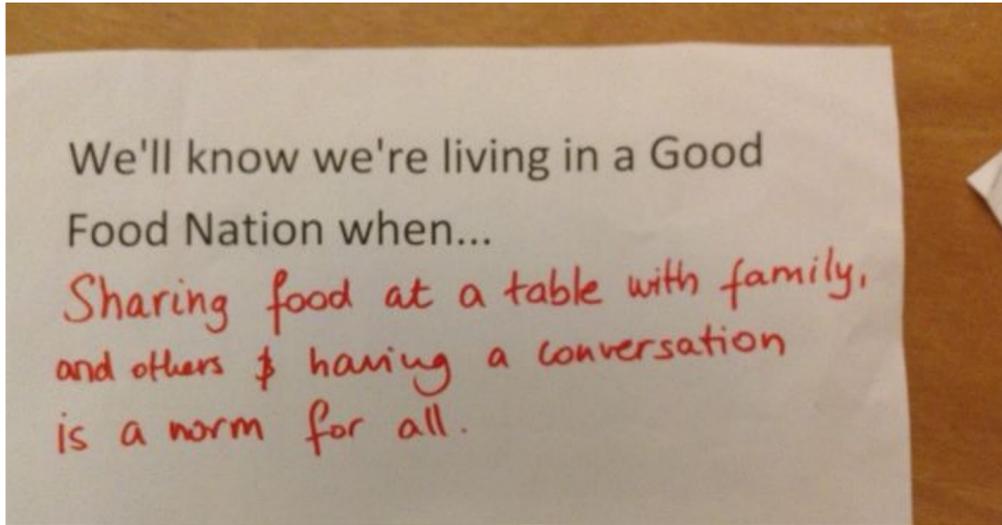
Kitchen Table Talks

After lunch, we got properly stuck in to discussing the food system, and how we can use the opportunity of the Good Food Nation Bill to change it - by trialling our own version of 'Kitchen Table Talks'.

With a big table cloth 'map' of the food system, each group mapped out 'the problem we're trying to solve', then thought about 'the vision: where we want to be in 2030' and then 'what did the Good Food Nation Bill do to get us there', by sticking coloured cards to the map. There were pre-written cards, and plenty of blank ones to input own ideas.



How will we know when we're living in a Good Food Nation?



- Scotland is renowned globally for the quality of its food and diet.
- Everyone understands what a healthy and sustainable diet is and can provide and access it for themselves.
- Everyone can answer this question!
- We are reconnected to the food system: to what we eat, and what that really means.
 - Life expectancy is consistently high across Scotland.
 - The hospitals are empty!
 - Food is grown, supplied, cooked, eaten together with love.

Many groups found the process a useful way of engaging with a whole-systems approach to food, and exchanging ideas for how we can start changing the structures of our food system. However, there was also lots of useful feedback in terms of things to adapt from this pilot version.

We'll be adapting the tool, ensuring its accessible for a wider audience and redesigning slightly so we don't start with the heavy 'problem we're trying to solve', which weighed people down with its urgency and vastness! Nearly everyone's hands shot up when we asked, 'who would be interested in running a Kitchen Table Talk with your friends, family, colleagues, or community?'. There's at least 100 Kitchen Table Talks to get us started!

How do we build our powerful movement?

In the final panel session of the day, we brought ideas and tactics for building more power in the movement.

Adam Ramsay (co-editor at Open Democracy) gave us a nine point plan for using the media (below).

Paul Bradley (Open Government Coordinator at CEMVO) asked 'Does the Government trust you?' and invited everyone to be bold, to get involved with the Open Government Partnership and demand more openness from our political decision makers.

Eve Keepax (Keep Scotland Beautiful) talked about creative campaigning – the key is listening to people! Make your projects visible, open, and welcoming!

- 1) Think about the audience you are trying to reach.
- 2) Choose what sort of media do you want to be covered in: Local newspaper/national/tabloid/broadsheet/magazine/blog/TV/radio, etc)
- 3) Choose what kind of coverage do you want: - Feature/News/ Comment
- 4) Remember journalists are lucky to hear from you
- 5) Remember journalists are busy (and getting busier)
- 6) Build relationships with the journalists you want to cover you. You are an expert. Make sure they know that.
- 7) Offer to write things yourself
- 8) Build your own profile - journalists are addicted to Twitter
- 9) Help build the media you want to see

These points are just as applicable to politics as the media, moving forwards in this movement, we have to be confident in ourselves and open with our ideas!

Next steps...

Pete Ritchie (Nourish) closed the day with a reminder that as a food justice movement, our diversity is our strength. The beautiful thing about food is that people can be very practically involved: building a different food system in our communities every day, as well as campaigning for transformative food policy. We need to work in ways which support our passion, allow us to keep in touch with different realities, and enjoy the world.

The next steps are yours! The Scottish Food Coalition organised this gathering and invite you to work with us to bring people together and join the dots. However, we need a movement that self-organises at the peripheries, not one that works from the core out. The Good Food Nation Bill is a once in a generation opportunity to create a seismic shift in our food system. All over the world people are looking at Scotland to see how we do cross-cutting framework food legislation. Let's stay connected, stay inspired and make our voices heard!

Thank you to everyone who came along, and filled the room with energy and ideas! Many thanks too to RSPB Scotland, Unison Scotland, Obesity Action Scotland, and the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, who were generous with their financial support for this gathering.

If you are interested in hosting a Kitchen Table Talk, or joining the nascent 'Good Food Nation Campaigners' network please get in touch with bella@foodcoalition.scot