

SCOPING AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT AND THE SCOTTISH SCIENCE ADVISORY COUNCIL

Project Title: Scotland's food security - the contribution of local production

Background

Following discussions with Scottish Science Advisory Council (SSAC) members and a variety of colleagues across the Scottish Government (SG), the contribution of local production to **food security** was identified as the theme which would be most useful to take forward.

The work will be closely aligned to SG policy and in particular the commitment in the 22-23 Programme for Government (PfG) to establish a Food Security Unit within the SG that will be tasked with "monitoring ongoing supply chain vulnerabilities and linking with future food security work"

At the same time food security cuts across a number of other policy areas, including climate change, health and wellbeing, so our work would need to be cross-sectoral. Hence the PfG commitment "Update *Catering for Change*, which will set out principles in relation to sustainable procurement of food and catering services in the public sector, to align public procurement behind sustainable, low carbon farming and food" is also relevant.

Context

SSAC have discussed a number of directions the work could take, and given the current interest in local food supply (see e.g. response to the recent SG consultation on local food <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/consultation-analysis/2022/07/analysis-responses-consultation-local-food-everyone2/documents/analysis-responses-consultation-local-food-everyone/analysis-responses-consultation-local-food-everyone/govscot%3Adocument/analysis-responses-consultation-local-food-everyone.pdf>) and recent publications¹ a focus on the opportunities and risks of increasing local production is considered to be an area where scientific evidence could prove useful.

From the consultation responses, as well as workshops, a number of key themes were evident. A number of barriers that link to our proposed themes were highlighted including:

- *Local food to be affordable and accessible to all, with a Right to Food embodied in local food policies.*
- *More land to be made available and accessible for those who wish to enter the market.*
- *Financial support and investment, including agricultural subsidy reform.*
- *A comprehensive, holistic and interdisciplinary approach across all relevant policy areas, particularly in relation to the environment; and policy interventions as aids for prioritising local food.*

¹ (<https://www.harper-adams.ac.uk/research/urban-farming/>) and <https://www.farmurban.co.uk/> <https://theecologist.org/2020/aug/19/local-food-and-global-food-security>

Proposal

The proposal is that SSAC would phrase several questions around innovation in local food production, which could cover urban and peri-urban farming, as well as remote rural and explore some international and national examples of innovative practices. These questions would form the basis of a virtual roundtable, (and could be informed also by a request for evidence). A second linked virtual roundtable could then consider the health, social and economic aspects. Attendees at the first roundtable could include industry, local communities, council staff as well as academics and NGOs, selected international invitees might also be appropriate. At the second, public health, nutritionists and academics would be invited.

Food systems are highly relevant to a number of policies, such as health, the economy, the environment (or it could be split into biodiversity, water and Net Zero). SSAC would follow a systematic approach to explore the potential impacts of a higher local sourcing of food on other policies areas.

Example questions include:

1. innovation and use of new technology to support (local) food provision. What are good case examples of innovative practice? Examples included vertical farming, (a further link to energy generation required was also made). What are examples of innovative (local/central) government policies to support (local) food provision?
2. What are the health, social and economic issues of local food provision, including its relation to food poverty and nutrition aspects?

Adding these to some previously identified questions/areas

3. Does a local food supply provide sufficient volume to bring increased resilience to the national food chain?
4. Is it predominantly seasonal and quite heterogeneous in its spatial provision, so how can that be factored into a national strategy?
5. What barriers are there to support a local food supply- and how might they be addressed?
6. Does a local food supply also crossover into 'growing your own food- what are the science issues?

Timescales

It is expected that the final report will be ready to publish by Spring 2023.

Next Steps

The next step would be to set up a Short Life Working Group led by Marian Scott, but with Wayne Powell and Maggie Gill as members plus external members.