

6 MARCH 2008

AGENDA ITEM 5

**Consideration of the Scottish Governments proposed National Food Policy for Scotland**

**Executive Summary**

- Members have been provided with copies of the Scottish Government consultation document 'Choosing the Right Ingredients – The Future for Food in Scotland'. They have also been informed by discussions with stakeholders on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2008
- Members of the Committee are invited to **consider** and **discuss the** questions raised in Annex A to this report and to provide the Agency with any additional advice.
- Members are reminded that a note of their discussion will formulate their advice on the Agency's response to the Scottish Government consultation. The Board is due to discuss this on **12<sup>th</sup> March 2008**.

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## BACKGROUND

1. The Scottish Government received cross-party agreement to the development of a National Food Policy for Scotland, following a Parliamentary debate on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2007. Subsequently a discussion document “Choosing the Right Ingredients - The Future for Food in Scotland” was produced. This discussion document is the focal point of a 3 month public consultation which was launched on 15<sup>th</sup> January. The paper is intended to help Scottish Ministers to agree a high level, cross-cutting food policy announcement of the outcome of the conversation. This is due to take place at the Royal Highland Show in June.
2. While, spanning all 5 of the Scottish Government (SG) policy portfolios and related visions<sup>1</sup>, the policy is being led by the Food Industry Unit, under the direction of Richard Lochhead (Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment). There is also close involvement of Shona Robison, Minister for Public Health, and Health & Wellbeing officials. Agency officials in Scotland have been liaising closely with SG colleagues, and have been fully involved in Scottish Parliament and Parliamentary Working Group discussions. We had significant input into formulation of the consultation document. We believe this has resulted in strong recognition for those elements of the project that link to the Agency’s strategic objectives.
3. The food policy discussion provides an opportunity for the Agency to promote our strategic objectives and how our activities support Scottish Government Health and Wellbeing priorities. The SG health and wellbeing objectives chime closely with those of the Agency with respect to promotion of healthy eating messages and promotion of consumer choice. The Agency now has an opportunity to provide input to development of the Scottish Government food policy agenda.

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<sup>1</sup> Healthier, Greener, Safer & Stronger, Smarter, Wealthier & Fairer

## **Main features of the Discussion Paper**

4. The document outlines a vision for food linked to the 5 high level strategic objectives of the Scottish Government and identifies initial thoughts on how to deliver these objectives including:

- Investing in schemes to enable people to know where their food comes from. (This is likely to link to the SG wish for improved traceability with country of origin labelling allowing “Scotland” to be identified)
- Innovating and developing more low-fat, low-salt and low-sugar foods.
- Promoting and selling more affordable and healthier foods.
- Teaching young children to cook and helping them learn about taste and nutrition.
- Make more positive choices about food we eat.

5. Many of the issues arising across the Scottish Government policy debate cover large elements of the Agency’s lead policy areas. The paper identifies the role it envisages Government bodies (including FSA) will have in what needs to be done to meet future objectives. This includes the following issues which are pertinent to the Agency’s policy remit:

- Helping vulnerable people and those on the lowest incomes to access affordable health food.
- Advising people about the importance of safe food and good nutrition.
- Supporting business in leading change to reformulate healthier products.
- Encouraging and supporting people to make healthier food choices.

## **Key Issues**

6. Some key issues likely to arise from the discussion paper are:
  - Squaring the objective of a successful cross-sector Scottish industry with promotion and identification of a healthy and sustainable food supply.
  - Guaranteeing safety and quality of food – wholesome, health giving and affordable
  - Positioning “Scottish food” to best advantage in the global market place
7. A strong focus of the debate to date has been the promotion and uptake of local Scottish produce. SFAC may wish to consider this feature of the debate in the context of the Agency’s need to develop a policy position in advance of negotiations with respect to country of origin labelling, which is part of the current wider EU review of food labelling. In addition the need for support for skills and training for the industry has been a key feature.
8. The FSA Board will receive a presentation from SG officials when they discuss the matter at the public meeting in Edinburgh on 12<sup>th</sup> March.
9. The Committee is invited to consider the questions posed in Annex A. Their views will be provided as formal advice to the Agency Board when it considers and agrees the Agency’s input to the food policy ‘conversation’ at its open meeting in Edinburgh.

## **Annex A**

### **Suggested key consultation questions for consideration**

Q1. Does the Committee agree that the areas of proposed future government involvement highlighted in Section 7 of this paper are comprehensive enough?

Q2. Are there any other areas the Committee think the Agency should be involved in?

Q3 Which areas do the Committee consider should be a priority for Agency involvement?

Q4. Does the Committee have specific advice to give the Agency on:-

- Country of Origin Labelling to assist identification of 'Scottish Produce'
- How the Food Policy might assist Scottish Industry to improve the diet of the Scottish population.
- Any other issues?