

Co-operation and Mutuality Scotland
Response to Scottish Government Consultation
Choosing the Right Ingredients: The Future for Food in Scotland

1. Introduction

1.1 Co-operation and Mutuality Scotland (CMS) is a membership organisation with a clear and focused purpose and vision. Our purpose is to develop and extend co-operation and mutuality in Scotland's communities. Our vision is to be a strategic voice for co-operation and mutuality; to be a partner, with government and others, in the development and support of new and existing co-operatives and mutual enterprises, and to be an effective forum for co-operative and mutual enterprise.

1.2 CMS is the main umbrella organisation for the co-operative and mutual sector in Scotland; it was launched in June 2003. CMS covers the full range of co-operative and mutual enterprises – namely worker co-ops, employee-owned businesses, housing co-ops, credit unions, other financial services, agriculture, fishing community businesses and consumer co-ops.

1.3 The co-operative and mutual sector has been in existence for nearly 200 years. It employs tens of thousands of people and contributes millions to the UK economy every year.

2. Scope of Co-operative Involvement in the Food Industry

2.1 CMS welcomes the opportunity to take part in this consultation. We believe that a joined-up approach to food policy will be a great benefit to the people of Scotland. Co-operative and mutual enterprises play an important role in the food sector in Scotland. From large retail

supermarkets to small health-food workers co-operatives; co-operatives offer a variety of solutions to the problems of food policy in Scotland. Co-operatives are involved in food production across Scotland, the Co-operative Group has its own farms and there are smaller scale food producing co-operatives. Co-operatives are the largest food retailers in Scotland, between the Co-operative Group and two co-operative societies (ScotMid and Lothian, Angus and Borders) co-operatives run over 450 supermarkets and convenience stores in Scotland. The Community Retailing Network is making its own response to the consultation but they represent a number of community food retail co-operatives in the islands of Scotland. This demonstrates that there are co-operative solutions to food policy issues which are valid for both urban and rural Scotland. We would argue that co-operatives are unique in this respect.

3. Overview

3.1 Unlike many other government consultations *Choosing the Right Ingredients* is not particularly prescriptive in its approach. This approach by the government is welcomed; however it does mean that the responses to this consultation are likely to be an eclectic mix of views. We would welcome further details of how the Scottish Government will take forward the ideas which come out of this policy consultation.

3.2 At page 5 of the document the Scottish Government sets out a vision of the issues that face the food industry in Scotland. 'We've begun to look at the much broader issues that affect everyone. Issues such as how we square a successful industry and satisfied consumers with a healthy natural environment; how we guarantee the safety and quality of our food; how we keep it wholesome and health-giving yet affordable, and how we position Scottish food to best advantage in the global marketplace, maximising returns back to Scotland.'

3.3 We believe that the only sector in the food industry that currently has a positive contribution to make on all of these issues is the co-operative sector.

4. Food is everyone's business

4.1 We welcome the government's recognition that 'food is everyone's business'. Through membership schemes co-operatives recognise that everyone has the right to a say about food policy and about the actions of their food retailer. One of the principles of co-operatives is democratic member control; we believe that the Scottish Government should offer further support for co-operatives in the food sector. If the government is serious about making food 'everyone's business' then it should encourage democratic involvement in the work of food retailers and suppliers.

4.2 CMS recognises that the majority of the Scottish population buy their food from supermarkets or convenience stores and that this means that the biggest customers for Scottish produce are retailers. Co-operatives are very aware of the responsibilities which this brings; another principle for co-operatives is concern for community. Co-operatives are active in promoting local and Scottish produce as well as highlighting healthy-eating. Evidence of this can be seen in the Ethical Food Policy of the Co-operative Group or in the aims of smaller worker co-operatives such as GreenCity Wholefoods in Glasgow or Highland Wholefoods based in Inverness.

4.3 Scotland has an unenviable reputation for having a poor diet and everyone involved in the food industry has a role to play in improving this situation. As the consultation paper states poor diet has an impact on many other parts of Scottish life and government activity. Poor diet does lead to a poor quality of life for the people concerned and it also leads to spending on the NHS which could be avoided. Many co-operatives promote healthy food. The Co-operative Group after consulting with

members and customers has committed to providing a greater range of healthy foods in its stores and in its own-brand products. CMS believes that this is because unlike other multiple food retailers the Co-operative Group has a duty to listen to its members and customers.

4.4 Public procurement of food by central and local government should make every effort to ensure that food bought plays a role in promoting healthy eating and in sustaining the environment and Scottish industry. CMS believes that buying from co-operatives, especially co-operative food producers, would be a major step forward in achieving these goals.

4.5 As part of co-operatives concern for the community all co-operatives are concerned about the environmental impact of food production and retail. Food producing co-operatives in Scotland contain people who live in the local area and have a commitment to the area and therefore they put a commitment to the environment high on their list of priorities. Small retail co-operatives are generally very committed to protecting the environment. The Co-operative Group is committed to action on its environmental impact. The Co-operative Group is the UK's leading retailer on climate change, be this via its support for renewable electricity; on-site renewables generation, energy efficiency or investment in quality carbon offset schemes. The Co-operative Group seeks to reduce the carbon footprint of products, but not at the expense of the poorest producers in the developing world. It seeks to reduce the waste arising from its operations and to increase recycling, the Co-operative Group is reducing its own brand packaging and switching to recycled or biodegradable materials. The Co-operative Group is increasing its use of products from sustainable sources.

4.6 CMS believes that co-operative and mutual food producers and retailers have an enviable record in terms of commitment to protecting the environment. CMS believes that the Scottish Government should look at

the work done by the co-operative and mutual sector as an exemplar of good practice in the protection of the environment.

5. Contribution to the Scottish Economy

5.1 CMS welcomes the Scottish Government's recognition that it is the government's job to promote prosperity and opportunity in Scotland in a way that is economically and socially viable and we also welcome the recognition that the food sector has important part to play in this task. We believe the co-operatives make a major contribution in this field. Co-operatives are found in the remotest parts of Scotland as well as in the most deprived parts of urban Scotland. Co-operative retail outlets provide services for areas that companies driven by the needs of share-holders neglect. CMS believes that the government should take this point on-board and provide further support for co-operatives.

5.2 Co-operatives contain both primary producers and retailers as well as representing consumers through the democratic member control of co-operative societies. CMS welcomes the government's belief that there is a need for a joined-up approach and again we would highlight that co-operatives represent one of the few sectors where many of these aspects have been joined-up already.

5.3 At page 11 in the consultation document the Scottish Government highlights some of the actions it has taken in the promotion of food policy since May 2007. CMS is disappointed to note that there are no specific mentions of working with the co-operative sector in this section of the document. We hope that the Scottish Government will see that it should work with the co-operative sector and promote co-operatives. Co-operatives provide the solutions to many of the problems which the government has raised.

6. Conclusion

6.1 As was stated at the outset of this paper CMS has welcomed the opportunity to contribute to this consultation. We hope that the government will see the positive impact which co-operatives are making throughout the length and breadth of Scotland. We hope that the government will do more to promote co-operatives as an important part of food industry in Scotland. Co-operatives can play a part in making Scotland's food industry a successful industry which satisfies customers and promotes concern for the environment; which delivers healthy, quality food which is affordable and which maximises returns to back to Scotland.