Highland Good Food Conference Report – Appendix

Contents

Project 1 – Develop a producer owned retail co-operative

Vision

A food retail hub with production facilities attached – butchery and kitchen – owned and run by producers.

Central location for ease of access acting as a distribution centre to all parts of the Highlands.

Core values

Providing more local food for local people

Food security – post-pandemic, resilience, knowing food is readily available

Connecting community with food sources

A model of getting produce to market to inspire other existing and potential producers

Unique Selling Points

Freshness.

Quality.

Local provenance.

Collectively owned.

Primary research

A survey of as many Highland small producers as possible to gauge buy-in.

If enough interest (20-30 minimum), establish a working group to explore:

- How constituted (CIC, Social Enterprise)
- Funding for retail consultant/co-ordinator (HIE, SOAS)

Discussion/further research

Still some concern about the benefits of co-operative over private enterprise – why have others failed in the past? What models work?

Producer owned or community owned – share ownership/investment?

Potential funding – HIE etc. Early conversations to sow seeds/identify grant schemes.

Background research/inspiration www.acnetworks.org

Project 2 – Develop a Highland-wide online food hub

Introduction

The diagram below is a pictorial representation of how the group interpreted the task given to establish "A Highland-wide Online Food Hub"
We felt as a group that the task could be best carried out by a central IT hub that served a number of local community centres which enabled customers to access and purchase local food and pick that up from the local physical hub. The definition of community would vary in different parts of the Highlands.

Schematic Diagram of Hub — Produce flow — Info flow
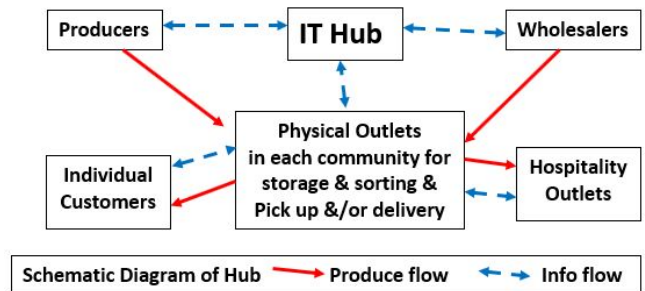
Our aims
- A food hub in every community, providing a convenient way for local suppliers to supply local customers.
- Shorten supply chains, reducing food miles and increasing local resilience and food security.
- Support independent producers and other local businesses, bolstering the local economy and community cohesion.
- Promote sustainability by reducing packaging and encouraging the use of seasonal produce from responsible sources.
- Enhance health by ensuring more of the great food grown in the Highlands is eaten in the Highlands.

IT infrastructure

We became convinced that there was no need to provide a bespoke IT system, since existing systems such as Open Food Network, Neighbour food and Big Barn provided tried and tested systems. Our feeling was that Open Food Network was probably the best option for moving forward with its co-operative ethos and reliance on Open Source software which would best suit our requirements but this would need research of existing users of the different systems.

How the system might work

The IT Hub would provide an up-to-date database of what was available at a particular point in time from local producers and wholesalers. This could be accessed by both customers and hospitality outlets who would send a weekly order to the local hub. These orders would be collated and passed to the IT Hub who would arrange for delivery weekly to the local hubs from the producers/suppliers and wholesalers. The local hubs would then have a number of days to sort individual orders before pick up on specified day of the week. There would be logistical issues of getting the bulk orders to the local hubs, but we haven't explored this in any detail.

Long Term Possibilities

In the longer term it may be desirable to expand the role of the HSG in order to provide additional support to local hubs. Ideas that have been discussed include...
- Seeking funding to provide a van and driver for both transporting food from suppliers to a central point and delivering it to customers. Since it is expected that hubs will tend to opt for a weekly or fortnightly order model such a resource could conceivably serve multiple hubs.

- Collective buying of produce and non-food items that cannot be sourced within the Highland network, or that is out of season. It is expected that customers will find local hubs a more attractive option if they have the potential to offer a larger range of items.

Conclusions

The major need moving forward is for much more data collection of what is happening already in both the Highlands and other comparable locations and also liaison with a number of other groups where our paths cross.

Project 3 – Work towards a world-class restaurant sector

Creating world-class restaurants in the Highlands by 2030
with an emphasis on locally-produced ingredients.

On the surface, this looks like a straightforward goal. But what does "world class" mean? If we take that to mean "on a par with the great restaurant centres of the planet", we have a long road to go. When was the last time anyone said, "let's go out for a Highland tonight"? When was the last time anyone was abroad and encountered a Scottish restaurant, let alone a Highland restaurant? Which Highland dishes have been embraced by other cultures and integrated into their cuisine?

Our international reputation for cooking is boiled stodge. Our low self-image is so ingrained that we're deathly timid about tooting our own horn and the first thing we lose when we emigrate is our Scottishness. Working in the restaurant industry is seen by Highlanders as the last resort of those unable to get a job sitting at a Tesco till. To reverse these negative characteristics and perceptions in a mere nine years would be miraculous. Perhaps we need to approach our restaurants from another angle.

What the Highlands are renowned for worldwide is our ingredients. We generate lots of revenue and esteem by exporting them. This excellent reputation should be the basis for our restaurant scene, not some need to catch up to culinary cultures that dominate worldwide presence. We'd do better to create a sense of exclusivity, along the lines of "the French save the best wine for themselves": if you want the *real* salmon, mussels, beef, venison, etc., you'd best come to the Highlands. That irresistible draw – not the number of forks and wine glasses on each table – will bring the world to the Highlands. World class.

Of course, we then have to make our restaurants work. Above all else, they are commercial ventures and must serve a variety of customers. Whilst Highland restaurants may share some ingredients with home cooks in their respective areas, it is important to recognize the reasons that people use restaurants:

- Convenience (to include tourists who may have no other recourse to meals)
- To eat dishes that would not or cannot be made at home
- As a treat (to include special occasions)

To support our world-class ingredients, our restaurants must need to succeed on all of the following levels:

- ■ Presenting the finest ingredients possible
  - o Particularly with local ingredients, traceability is highly desirable and source information should be provided at point of delivery to the restaurant
  - o Supply chain elements of local producers must equal that of traditional wholesalers in terms of consistency of availability, quality and price
  - o Transparency with the customer in regard to ingredients that are not or cannot be locally produced, e.g., pepper, grape wine, olive oil etc.; and to ingredients that are imported when they're out of season locally, e.g., potatoes, tomatoes, soft fruit etc. Also, elimination of the misleading term, "locally-sourced"

- ■ Appealing to the tastes of their customers
  - o Key on the familiar, exported ingredients and supplement with locally-grown fruit & veg, realising that visitors may not understand or enjoy some traditional Highland dishes. Just as many Far East restaurants do not force fermented fish or pig tendon on Westerners, if someone has heard of haggis, they will ask for it *(Jim's experience & opinion, not the group's, necessarily)*
  - o Regardless of price point, the experience should represent good value for money. This is particularly important for the repeat custom of local customers, but also keeps us from gaining a negative global reputation. Maintaining a good value is, however, impossible when the supply chain is expensive

- ■ Providing a hygienic and welcoming atmosphere
  - o An appealing and tidy storefront
  - o Signage that accentuates the positive, instead of who or what is *not* allowed
  - o Appropriate level of cleanliness inside
  - o Tidy and hygiene-conscious staff
  - o A verbal welcome to customers as they enter

- ■ Serving with a professional attitude
  - o Politeness
  - o Empathy to the customer's situation, e.g., non-English-speaking, handicapped, just plain gurney, etc.
  - o Knowledge of the offerings, e.g., fluency with each dish's ingredients & preparation, options to suit various diets etc.
  - o Sense of the restaurant as a single organism that depends on a coördinated effort among staff to operate successfully

Staff training is an essential part of the success of Highland restaurants. Cooks need to know how to cook and servers need to know how to serve. Our colleges generally let our restaurants down by failing to prepare students for reality. Whether it be by subscribing to the irrelevant and outdated French brigade system or by teaching recordkeeping without the science behind the records,

students enter the restaurant workforce without basic kitchen or service skills. Apprenticeship programmes simply put the knowledge-transfer responsibilities on the lap of the restaurant, effectively rendering college qualifications meaningless.

Likewise, the restaurant is like any other workplace: it needs to be respectful, fair, transparent and civil. Management cannot expect good work from staff who are belittled or used as target practice for flying frypans. In order for the restaurant industry to thrive, management needs to lead by positive example.

All of these issues contribute to the customer experience. Any customer-facing setting is subject to disruption by nature of human behavior. Restaurants that manage the predictable outcomes will be better prepared to handle the unknown. This is particularly relevant in the Highlands, where – at any time – the electrics go out or the snow gates go up or the boiler packs it in with no repairman within 100 miles. If we have our usual business practices under control, we can then shrug our shoulders and tell customers, "that's life in the Highlands", a small price to pay to experience our amazing food at the source.

Project 4 – Develop a lobbying policy group for the Highland voice

TOPIC OUTLINE
Develop a lobbying policy group ensuring the Highland voice is heard whilst striving for good food for all.

PROCESS
We had long discussions about what policies should be pursued, and how we could achieve the biggest impact on policy makers.

The group decided that it was not our place to define specific policy – we are not professional policy makers, nor are we, as a group, representative enough of the Highlands. However we recognised that there is a set of core values, identified in this conference, that support our Highland Good Food vision. Rather than pursue specific policy, we should instead be helping to amplify the "Highland voice", and highlighting successful projects that achieve these core values. The core values could be summarised as:
- We produce food in a sustainable, agro-ecological way that supports biodiversity and protects and preserves our natural environment (and the wider world).
- We work together to support our growers, consumers and communities, with mutual respect, and take responsibility for our own food systems.
- Our food system is fair, with affordable food available for everybody, a fair income for producers, and anybody can participate in it
- Our food system is diverse, resilient and innovative.

The group realised that it would be difficult for us to have a direct voice with policy makers - we are not professional lobbyists, and do not have the presence, contacts or clout for this. Instead, we must look for the small things that we can do that will have the biggest impact, and work through existing organisations.

Yvan taught us three important things that are needed to influence policy makers:
1. EVIDENCE of what works, tangible data and examples – such as case studies or stories
2. CLEAR COMMUNICATION of this evidence – well researched and well presented
3. PRESSURE from a SOCIAL MOVEMENT - the Highland Good Food Conversation is this movement.

We decided that we could have the biggest impact on policy makers (and therefore on policy) by finding out what other lobbying groups and organisations are interested in (their current vision and policy targets) and then communicating to them examples from the Highlands that speak to their vision, while also representing the Highland voice for Good Food. We need to publicise Highland Good Food projects as ambassadors of good practice, showing evidence that our Highland Good Food values can create real change for the better and meet the goals of lobbyists and policy makers in terms of carbon, biodiversity, sustainable agriculture and community resilience.

We realised that we need this communication to work both ways. We don't just need to tell stories from the Highlands to the policy makers, we also need to help communities stay informed about what is happening in policy making, and where we need pressure from our social movement to help effect change. It is also essential for our integrity that we maintain direct links with Highland communities and other stakeholders, to ensure that we continue to authentically represent the "Highland voice".

CONCLUSION
The role of the policy group needs to permeate through all the projects and ongoing work for the HGFC. It should be a key vehicle in communicating HGFC work and successes with the wider world, and should provide constant reference back to the core values identified at the HGFC Conference, keeping future work of the HGFC on this course. New opportunities, developments and challenges will no doubt come along and plans and focus may change, but we need to stay true to the core vision identified at the HGFC Conference, and to the "Highland voice".

We need to collect stories and case studies of successful projects, systems and changes across the Highlands that epitomise the Highland Good Food core values. The best of these examples (selected to cover key aspects of our Good Food system, with clear messages that speak to issues relevant to policy makers) need to be well-communicated, with high quality film making, written reports and photos. In addition to these well documented case studies, we need a list of similar projects which can be referred to for more evidence and information on particular topics.

We need to identify where these projects align with the goals of other political and lobbying organisations (or influential individuals) and then share the appropriate Highland Good Food story with them. They will be able to use the story to support their agenda, putting it in the view of policy makers, and clearly communicating to policy makers the evidence of how our Highland Good Food values are enabling positive change.

Now is the time to make real changes to our food system – with Covid, the climate emergency, biodiversity crisis and Brexit combining to create an environment ripe for change. Things have to change – politicians realise this. We need to make sure they change in the direction that supports the Highland Good Food vision.

PROPOSED COURSE OF ACTION
Develop a policy group and strategy, not to develop new policy, but to bring Highland core values and the "Highland voice" to the attention of policy makers to change attitudes of politicians and influence policy.

We need a nodal approach with community-level conversations, supported by a central core team. Peer-to-peer interactions at community-level will gather local Good Food stories, and enforce the momentum of our movement. Volunteers at this community level will provide the communication link between communities and the central core team. The central core team will prepare and publish the Highland Good Food stories and bring them to the attention of relevant organisations involved in lobbying and policy. They will also communicate information about the current key issues and developments in food policy back to local volunteers, who will share it with their communities.

It is expected that sharing case studies and stories to lobbying and policy organisations on social media, along with sharing to the mainstream media, will usually suffice. However, more personal interactions and networking should also be pursued wherever possible.

What is needed :
1. Funding – to pay staff to create decent material case studies and stories. Start with 10 with a wide spectum and have 50 lined up as reference. Up-and-coming filmmakers and photographers may be interested in helping with this.
2. An online presence – to host case studies online, provide official email addresses and a social media presence. Hopefully this can be provided as part of HGFC's ongoing structure.
3. A central core team (some of whom will need to be paid, but it may be possible to do this as part of an existing or ongoing HGFC role), with a network of volunteers in communities.
4. Integration and interaction with other project groups within HGFC to pick up policy issues to be flagged up and projects to form the start of our case study portfolio;
5. Start mapping stakeholders and key lobbying and policy organisations.

Project 5 – Work towards every school gowing, cooking and eating their own food

Our vision for 2030 is that all schools in Highland will be growing schools.

We would like to elaborate on our group's aim, to make it clear that we mean for our approach to growing to mean looking after the soil, promoting biodiversity, as well as minimising waste in all stages of growing and cooking. We look forward and see a decade of change. We believe that supporting all Highland schools to take great leaps forward in growing, cooking and eating food can be a huge part of the changes ahead both as part of the green recovery post Covid, and also in helping us to reach net zero carbon by 2045. Mental health and wellbeing are being recognised as an important issue going forward, as we continue to live with Covid, and look ahead. There is a growing body of evidence that time outside spent with nature has positive outcomes on our mental health and wellbeing.

Our group consisted of a mixture of those who currently support their local school with growing and cooking and local producers who would like to connect more with schools and offer support with education.

During the course of the conference, we were joined by several visitors, who helped us shape our vision with some additional input:

Brid McKibben - The Highland Council, Catering services
Lucie Wardie – Soil Association, Food for Life

Keith Masson – The Highland Council, Climate Change and Energy Team
Karen Henderson – Tarradale Primary school

Additional telephone discussions outwith the conference with:

Ailsa Villagas from The Green Health Partnership
Dave Rex – The Highland Council Dietician

And contacted Christine Gordon – the highland Council Quality Improvement Officer, who would also like to be involved going forward.

The Vision

By 2030 all schools in Highland are food growing schools.

Picture visiting your local school. As you approach, you can see and hear that there are children outside. This isn't break time – they are taking part in lessons outside, learning to grow food as a normal part of their daily routine. Their voices sound happy. The outdoor learning that they are doing in growing food is how several parts of the curriculum are delivered – numeracy and literacy, as well as science and technology. Whether your local school is urban or rural, whether it has a large school grounds or small, concrete space, there will be visible signs of an abundance of growing – herbs in pots, potatoes grown in sacks, soft fruit ripening and plenty of flowers and blossom to keep the pollinators happy. As you walk up to the school door you can hear the bees buzzing in amongst the flowers, and a butterfly lands on your nose. Too much? We really hope not!

The learning that they begin at pre-school level in nursery, then primary school continues into secondary school and beyond to tertiary education. The food-growing endeavours also strengthen links with local communities, with community groups, and volunteers from allotments, men's sheds etc connecting with the schools to share learning.

We are clear, too that this learning isn't discrete and only relevant during "growing time" with the return to the classroom, or the school canteen being connected with different values or contradictory messages. This is a fully integrated approach and the messages about good food, which is sustainably produced, reducing food waste, healthy eating will be consistent throughout any given child's education journey from nursery through to secondary school. These children will have had many positive learning experiences outside. They will have learned how to nurture the soil, they will know how to grow food that they enjoy eating.   They will be confident in choosing healthy nutritious food that they can cook as they become a new generation of adults.

Over the next decade, we need much change. Healthy, happy children, with good solid grounding of how to grow, cook and eat fresh fruit and vegetables are part of that. Maybe these young people become part of our future food system as the next generation of regenerative farmers, or climate-savvy chefs in our hotels and restaurants.   Maybe they will not, but they will have learned to grow and cook their own food. They will all have formed good habits in nurturing their own sense of wellbeing through connecting with nature and have gained in confidence and enjoyed a sense of achievement that growing and cooking can bring.

This will see further greening of the school grounds which will be part of adapting our communities to climate change as well as improving biodiversity. This will also see our communities becoming

more food resilient, with increased growing spaces in schools and communities at large as normal and increased growing skills that go with that.

Co-benefits

- Beneficial effects of time outside on mental health & wellbeing
- Fostering a healthy relationship with nutritious food choices
- Reducing health inequalities
- Connecting children with where food comes from
- Sustainable food production recognised as a key life skill
- Greater food security within in our communities
- Being part of the solution to removing organic waste from landfill through composting
- Creating more green spaces as part of addressing the climate emergency and biodiversity collapse
- Increasing physical activity

Covid Recovery

We believe that supporting schools in growing will give schools opportunities to focus on wellbeing through outdoor learning as part of the return to schools following lockdown.
We have also seen during the pandemic increases in social inequalities, which are known to lead to health inequalities. A programme such as this puts good food at the heart of all schools which would help to address these inequalities.

As we have all adapted to home schooling and home learning (and home-working) some opportunities have presented themselves. We have embraced video-calls like never before! Some of the barriers that existed, for example in taking a class to visit a farm to see where their food comes from can be overcome using this model that we have mastered to cope with the pandemic. We may find that it is possible to create strong links with local producers through virtual visits delivered via video and combined with video calls for question and answer sessions.

Next Steps

It's clear that these are ambitious aims, bringing a wide range of benefits to both our children and our society.

During the course of our discussions, it became clear too, that there are a great many educational resources and funding opportunities currently available.

Additionally, there have been previous initiatives in the Highland that have covered different aspects of our proposal, from developing school grounds, growing food schemes, and also composting and food waste projects.

To take this project forward, we need to widen our group and connect with partners who have Highland-wide remits that fit within our aims, such as:

The Highland Council – Education, and teachers in pre-school, primary and secondary schools
The Highland Council – Climate Change & Energy
The Highland Council – Climate Change adaptation
The Highland Council - Food and Health in Schools
The Highland Council – Quality Improvement

The Highland Council – Waste Management
The Highland Council – Catering Services
NHS Highland Public Health
Nature Scot
The Green Health Partnership
Highland Third Sector Interface
Highland Environmental Network
The Trussel Trust

Once we have extended the group, we can look at how the initiatives needed to realise the vision fit with shared objectives. From this we can prioritise the next steps and agree a plan.

We believe that we need to build on the existing examples of good practice and share this learning to all schools. This can include signposting teaching resources, lesson plans etc. Also, importantly, highlighting key sources of funding which can help with tools, watering systems, seeds, fruit trees, planting for wildlife, polytunnels etc. There would be some work in drawing together this information and communicating with schools.

We are not starting from nothing. There are some lessons to be learned from what has gone before and worked.   We would also like to learn from where projects haven't succeeded (e.g. Ridan composters at some schools that have fallen out of use).   What support would be needed to keep these ventures successful in the longer term?

We must identify the existing barriers and find creative ways to overcome these. An initial survey can be put to schools looking at all aspects of their food growing, cooking and eating practices to help build an up-to-date picture of how schools are currently doing in growing, cooking and eating, and find further successes to celebrate and what their challenges are.

Project 6 – Develop a Highland community food growing network

Food grown by a community for use within that community

AIMS & EXPLANATIONS
Aim 1: For every interested community to have community growing initiatives
 To improve holistic health and wellbeing for the members of the community that it serves.
 To share skills, experience, resources and learning on good food: how to grow, how to cook.
 To develop an appreciation and understanding of the real value of nourishing high-quality food.
 To increase the availability and accessibility of healthy local food for everyone.
 To bring communities together; improve resilience, recover post-pandemic, reduce the risk of social isolation, provide a catalyst for further community projects.
 To address wider issues such as community resilience and long-term sustainability.
 To respond to the climate and ecological emergency.

Aim 2: To connect existing community growing groups in a network
 To share resources e.g. tools/equipment, seeds, experts and to reduce running costs.
 To help other groups set up and keep up momentum.
 To share success stories and realistic stumbling blocks from other communities and increase the motivation for people to take action and stick with it.

To provide a resource hub with access to information, e.g. on land access, obtaining financial support, growing expertise.

To signpost to other agencies such as Voluntary Groups Sutherland (VGS), Highland Third Sector Interface (HTSI), Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE), etc.

ACTION PLAN

1. A desktop data collection collating information about existing community groups, such as their locations and their remit.
2. A survey/interview (face-to-face or on a networking/meeting platform) to facilitate data collection on those groups' willingness to be included in a Highland Wide Network.
3. A second survey for areas with no community growing (e.g. through Buy Swap and Sell groups on Social Media) to scope the interest levels in the communities in setting up a local growing project (with or without support). In some cases there may be an organisation local to that area who are already undertaking this manner of work – they could act as liaison point for communities who are keen to participate but who do not yet have anything set up.
4. Collaborate with the other project groups from the HGFC to create a comprehensive web tool which will allow mapping of existing community groups who wish to participate and areas with fledgling growing projects, to be added to the bigger picture resource mapping. (The bigger picture includes for-profit sales, Third Sector Activity, hubs, pantries, participating schools and community resilience larders, and an area where people can go to access support e.g. with education, funding, access to land, or to find what is local to them for volunteering opportunities.)
5. Partnership working with other project groups of the HGFC to increase visibility and transparency, to create social media accounts (if necessary) or to use existing accounts to increase social media presence, for positive influence, project visibility and easier access to information.
6. Support HGFC to act as coordinator/liaison with other organisations (including HTSI and HEN) and coordinate activity accordingly.

Note: We have a small group of dedicated volunteers ready to take this forward.

Project 7 – Work to big-up small farms in the Highlands

A Highland-wide proactive network for farmers, growers, crofters (etc) and primary food processors who make all or some of their living from food production in the Highlands and Islands or aim to in the future. These organisations should have or be working towards an environmentally and socially responsible model and sell some, or all of their output in the Highlands.

2030: the vision
A thriving network of land-based producers across the Highlands who know each other, offer each other support, and share knowledge and resources.

Pathways for new entrants/aspiring land workers to establish themselves within the Highlands.

An increased amount of food eaten in the Highlands produced in the Highlands . And for this food to be produced in a way that is sustainable.

An increased number of diverse enterprises growing food and providing a living (part or whole) for those who live on them.

An increase in public awareness about the benefits of supporting local producers. Increase in community involvement through CSA's/'open farm days' to increase the bond between the producers and the customers.

Aims
1. To support each other through some form of web based network, occasional meet ups, tours etc. To access educational and training opportunities as a group and promote them generally. To buy from and promote each other's businesses where possible/practical.
2. To support and encourage new entrants. Through volunteering and employment opportunities, mentoring etc
3. To actively seek opportunities to expand the range and number of socially and environmentally responsible small food businesses serving the Highlands. Maybe accessing funding for start ups, finding land and providing advice.

Web based network:
- An accessible network where we can regularly communicate and build relationships with each other across the Highlands. As we are all geographically dispersed, a web based network works well for this.
- Online training can be organised through this platform when there is demand. This can be formal advertised training (that has a fee to those not in this network?) and also more informal training/sharing within the group which is set up by members (zoom meeting about topics of interest)
- A website to communicate our aims and objectives and provide news.
- Also a more informal chat like space such as Slack - Group 7 have been using this well already as a place to share ideas
- And a closed Facebook group - this has already been set up: Highland Good Food Growers

Meet ups:
- Create an annual weekend gathering on a Highland croft where participants can take part in training and knowledge sharing. A fun event where we all get to know each other. Event to change location each year. Along the lines of Farm Hacks organised further south by Land Workers Alliance. Could also provide opportunity to hold an AGM if necessary.
- Tours of members farms/crofts to be organised at different times of the year. Possibly returning to same farm/croft at different times of year.

Learning Opportunities as a group:
- Opening up our own farms/crofts to each other to participate in in-house training and knowledge sharing

- Collectively establishing training requirements as a group and approaching organisations who currently already offer training (such as Scottish Crofting Federation, Soil Association, Scottish Advisory Service etc)

New Entrants - volunteering

New Entrants - employment opportunities
- A place where members can advertise job openings

New Entrants - mentoring
- Members of this group will be able to offer mentoring to new entrants. This may be part of a mentoring scheme or more informal. This would be based on the mentors land where possible and also with online regular chats. There would be a framework to follow and mentoring would last for 1 year(?)

Increase number of environmentally responsible small food businesses
- As a group we will help support start ups around the Highlands through offering advice, directing to land opportunities and Scottish land matching services, link with mentoring support etc.
- We will also support existing producers who want to develop sustainable, food products matched to local demand

To be confirmed … a number of varieties of crop whose seeds are being maintained within the network …

How:
1. Apply for funding to employ a project officer for 2 years to get this enterprise up and running to a point where it is self sustaining (through membership fee) to continue role of project officer
2. Set up organisation as a CIC with an annual subscription fee
3. Establish an online platform(s)
4. Folk wanting to join the organisation will be asked a series of questions about their growing practices, priorities and aims for the future :
    a. you farm following environmentally responsible methods which use natured based solutions
    b. If you keep livestock do you avoid non-British feedstock, conform to organic standards on housing / welfare
    c. Do you actively promote soil health (adding compost etc)
    d. Are you actively trying to reduce carbon emissions **etc etc group to work on wording of this point** / increase soil sequestration / enhance biodiversity etc

Next Steps:
1. Members of Group 7 will continue to take this forward. The next meeting is to be held via Zoom. If others want to join please get in touch to be sent zoom link
2. Establish our constitution going forward

3. Establish possible funding streams

Project 8 – Develop a Highland circular food economy

Group 8's action plan is a powerpoint presentation and can be accessed **here**.

Project 9 – Marketing and promoting local Highland food as a brand

Five weeks ago we looked at this idea of having a Highland brand. We were all very enthusiastic and positive.

We brainstormed and decided the brand wouldn't be a high cost membership but still need subscription and it would be based on quality and values. But as the weeks progressed the idea changed to being more geographical.

Originally, we looked at the Highlands as a region and although we considered the council boundaries, we thought the fault line was more future proof.
We also found out there's currently around 7-8 regional brands in Scotland and we believe that there may be plans in place to form a Scottish food brand at some point in the future. And the more regional brands there are, the more diluted the Scottish brand might be.

So five weeks ago this project seemed very feasible but having heard from industry actors and got more resources, we realised this is a much bigger project that needs more time and input.

Gradually, we understood that this is a very complex project and it might not be a priority project at this point, especially since Ceri Ritchie let us know that quality was much harder to assess than geographical origine. This would require specialist knowledge and funds to back up the verification and qualification process

We released a survey to you all to know more about what you would expect from a brand and early results suggest respondents would want the brand to guarantee Sustainability, Ethics and Accountability. Those are among the harder areas to assess but they seem to be unique criteria that would set the brand apart.

One major question that remains is what do food actors have to gain from creating this brand? Another is who will be the custodian?

In the meantime, we are thinking about setting up an industry/ business focused network to reinforce business links in the Highlands food and drink industry. We are reaching out to more people to help us in this process such as Alister from Taste of Arran who runs not just a brand but about what amounts to a regional food group.

Project 10 – Create a thriving glasshouse sector in the Highlands

Over the 4 weeks we have developed our project ideas and ended up with the idea of creating a thriving glasshouse growing industry within Highland producing a significant amount of year-round growing and an increase in jobs. Our vision is that when we fly into Dalcross Inverness Airport in 15 years, we will have a similar view to that we get today, flying into Schiphol airport in the Netherlands. The view on the approach is many strips of vegetable beds owned by small scale farmers. Then there are the reflections off the glasshouses which cover a hectare or 100m x 100m. Tiny countries are already feeding themselves, so why not Highland leading the way for Scotland?
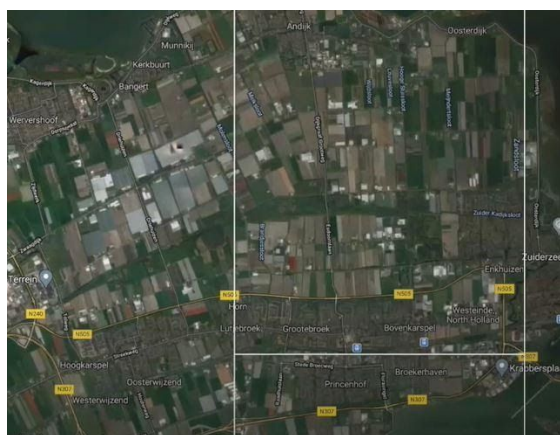
It is a bit strange that growing more in Highland has become a talking point. In reality, we're looking at refreshing technology that's been around for a long time. It is really only in the past 40 years there has been little growing in Highland. In the 70s there was a growth in Hydroponics. Today there is increased interest in using renewable energy technology for year-round natural growing methods with the use of light changing spectrums and heat. The scale we envisage is purposeful because over the last 30 years initiatives have focused on small scale producers selling direct to customers. The Cooperative has recently constructed a distribution hub for 23 stores across Highland at Dalcross. A retailer like this requires continuity of supply which can only be achieved by a substantial local producer with year-round growing facilities.

We will need to source an ideal site, with good soil, access to large markets, distribution, water and energy. This may be Dalcross. We want to start with a 1ha glasshouse based on successful technology used in countries such as Finland, the Netherlands and Norway. The aim is to displace imports and feed ourselves from locally grown food as the climate becomes less stable and there is growing alarm at how food miles add to carbon emissions. There are also increasing concerns about access to water in countries like Spain, which is one of the main sources of our produce today.

In addition to this large-scale enterprise how do we create wider access to locally grown produce across Highland? As a second project we see the creation of a further hectare of growing space by having 20 different 500sq m glasshouses dotted across Highland. These could be run by community minded businesses or by business minded communities. The connection to the major glasshouse hub would be through shared technology, skills and agronomy. One topic that has not been raised in the conference so far is the use of off-peak renewable electricity and other sources of local renewable energy for heating and lighting. We see these as having great potential to keep down costs and be sustainable and environmentally friendly. We will look into the donut economics, bring in the externalities and show the real economic benefit of creating a thriving glasshouse sector within Highland.

There is an overlap with other groups in what we want to achieve. So, to move away from a silo approach, we want to create a centralised resource that has a wonderful flow of knowledge and connection with other groups. In particular, we are thinking of the Highland Good Food Conversation

producer owned co-op projects, the online food group, and bigging up small farms. There may well be others.

In addition to the hardware aspects above, there is the importance of the software or how we will deliver this through people. We observe mainland European growers being better at collaborating than growers in the UK. There, there is a history of developing a higher standard of cooperatives. While primary growers in the UK link quite well, there are fewer examples covering the whole process from grower to the end customer. We see the organisation we develop lending technical and agronomy support to the smaller growers who will put in, and risk, considerable capital. So, building a strong support structure on the commercial aspects is an important component of our project. We have a considerable set of skills and experience in our group to turn the vision of developing a thriving glasshouse growing industry in the Highlands into reality.