Submission to the Scottish Affairs Committee in connection with the Future of Scottish agriculture post-Brexit inquiry

Introduction

Bread for Good Community Benefit Society - trading as “Scotland the Bread” (BFGCBS) has a long-term strategy to inform and implement the development of new local food systems.

BFGCBS is a small non-profit with deep roots in transformational change of the food system, growing as it does out of its founder’s more than forty years of experience in food production and processing, first as an organic baker and latterly as a teacher and researcher whose books (Bread Matters and DO Sourdough: Slow bread for busy lives) and teaching have ‘changed the way we think about bread’ (Special Judges Prize, BBC Food & Farming Awards, 2012). There’s more about Andrew’s background in the appendix to this submission.

Progress over the past five years has been informed by the best research and strongly founded in local collaborations:

- 2013 - 13 heritage wheat accessions (via John Innes Centre) grown on four farms in Scotland.
- 2014 - Testing by James Hutton Institute (funded by Technology Strategy Board £5k voucher) shows elevated levels of minerals and trace elements compared to common varieties.
- 2016 - Formation of non-profit Bread for Good Community Benefit Society. Community groups trained in growing, milling and baking in the Soil to Slice programme (see Appendix).
- 2017 - Scotland The Bread wholemeal flour launched; planting on Balcaskie Estate of 20 ha of ten varieties of winter and spring wheat and rye including high nutrient and diverse Nordic landraces.
- 2018 - Mill operation expands to Bowhouse, Fife as a proof of concept and supplier to local bakery and catering businesses.

The Bowhouse is part of the Balcaskie Estate, a modern working estate at the heart of the East Neuk of Fife committed to cultivating and caring for the natural environment, nurturing local business and supporting a vibrant community. It aims for efficiency and high standards within the clear framework of farming as part of a sustainable environment. The estate’s Bowhouse development is a major contribution to stimulating the local food economy. It replaces a missing link in the food chain from field to fork – from farmer to consumer – by providing dedicated space for producers to operate in as well as a large, covered market space and destination for producers and consumers interested in the best local food and produce. Balcaskie represents farming excellence and innovation, significant resources of land and buildings and a strong collaborative presence in the local food and business economy.

We’re now at the point where

- the potential for providing credible supply chains of Scottish, high-nutrient wheat has been validated,
- support programmes for formative Community Baking Groups have been explored,
- public engagement projects such as Soil to Slice and our new milling presence are attracting high public interest, and
- BFGCBS now has a pilot milling facility established on a farm estate demonstrating the potential for diversification and integration with food production.
One of our aims is to inspire individuals and groups to disseminate the knowledge and skills that will enable communities to nourish people from the fields around them, enrich their health, their local economies and increase locally-sourced food consumption. Our approach is to innovate, collaborate and participate in projects that will improve the capacity of communities to feed themselves well by improving:

- the nutritional quality of bread and of wheat and other grains, and
- health, food security, social cohesion and local economic sustainability.

Scottish agriculture post-Brexit

The prospect of Brexit has led to much greater scrutiny of sustainable business models for agriculture in the future and the resilience of our food chains. For example, the Dundee Courier recently quoted a spokesman from Carr’s Flour Mill in Kirkcaldy noting how supplies of flour might come to a standstill when imported grain supplies are disrupted, leading to a loss of bread production. It’s worth noting that this story about grain importation to Scotland is set against the backdrop of Fife’s significant potential for nutritious cereal growing and doesn’t recognise the potential to address such challenges through a shift of focus in agricultural policy at home. The additional scrutiny around Brexit has highlighted food-chain vulnerabilities and challenges that have been concerning expert groups for some time:

"The food system, as it is today, is not fit for the future. The way food is produced and consumed is neither sustainable nor healthy, and we are insufficiently prepared for the changing climate, the increasing and ageing population, urbanisation, and the depletion of natural resources." (Statement by Food 2030 Independent Expert Group).

The prospect of Brexit has led to the present consideration of public subsidy for agriculture. In England, the Agriculture Bill is based on the concept of "public goods for public money." In a Scottish context, we support the principles in this regard also as set out by Scottish Environment Link here.

Away from Brexit, the challenges associated with funding according to public good outputs offers a much bigger opportunity:

“Equal adherence to all four sustainability goals of production, environment, economics and social wellbeing does not limit but encourages farmers and researchers to innovate. The challenge facing policymakers is to create an enabling environment for scaling-up organic and other innovative farming systems to move towards truly sustainable production systems. This is no small task, but the consequences for food and ecosystem security could not be bigger. To make this happen will require mobilizing the full arsenal of effective policies, scientific and socioeconomic advances, farmer ingenuity and public engagement.”

Recommendations

We believe that it is appropriate and timely to consider how nutritional outputs can be maximised from Scottish agriculture. If returns from agricultural subsidy are considered in the context of public

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1 Dundee Courier 29.9.18, P. 14 “Flour Mill Boss warns bread could disappear from shelves completely”
2 https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/d0c725de-6f7c-11e8-9483-01aa75ed71a1/language-en
4 www.scotlink.org
benefit, a “nutrition per hectare” type of approach should be integrated. We’ve already shown that BFGCBS’s heritage grains can perform well in that regard.

Essentially the nutritional yield per hectare from subsidised farming activities should be recognised as a public good and our recommendation to the inquiry is that **short to medium term demonstrator projects should be established as part of a suite of public good experiments that can inform Scottish agricultural subsidy mechanisms going forward**. Such demonstrator projects will help to define the true public-good value of nutritional yield set in the wider context of all other public benefits (economic, inspirational, social and environmental) enabling choices to be made about subsidy criteria. Given that this inquiry is also interested in the innovation and technology dimension our approaches show that not all productivity benefits flow from technology-driven innovation. Any innovation funding distribution should be balanced to support a blend of innovative approaches including the demonstrator projects proposed above.

As The Lancet said here⁶:

> “Humanity can be stewarded successfully through the 21st century by addressing the unacceptable inequities in health and wealth within the environmental limits of the Earth, but this will require the generation of new knowledge, implementation of wise policies, decisive action, and inspirational leadership.”

Scotland has a significant opportunity to lead in this regard and consideration of nutritional yield should be part of that leadership.

**Appendix**

**Andrew Whitley**

Andrew Whitley originally founded the Village Bakery Melmerby in 1976 and inspired a new wave of artisan bakeries that are slowly transforming community food provision. He has a track record of successful product development, notably being the first baker to supply properly-fermented sourdough bread to multiple retailers. His research into one of the drivers of this new market – wheat and gluten intolerance – led to the Real Bread Campaign with its triple focus on personal diet, local food and environmental responsibility. His vision is to bring together expertise and research evidence across the whole food system from soil to slice and to catalyse economic activity, skilful and rewarding jobs and improved public health.

Andrew pioneered training for Community Baking Groups leading to social enterprises such as the Breadshare Community Bakery in Edinburgh. Andrew’s advocacy has inspired such communities with the realisation that making bread for our fellow citizens is noble work. When bread production makes use of grain and flour that has been bred, grown and milled locally, with attention to its nutritional properties, it becomes a powerful agent for change. If the bakery business is rooted in, and supported by, the local community, it will contribute to the health, skills, confidence and economic security of a much wider group than those directly involved.

**Soil to Slice**

As an example of how BFGCBS has **delivered impactful community outreach**, the Soil To Slice citizen science project has the purpose of helping local communities to grow and bake their own healthy bread, from the soil to the slice.

BFGCBS provided each group with:

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⁶ Lancet Commissions on Planetary Health
Seed from three of the Scottish heritage wheat varieties in Scotland The Bread’s research project — and support each community group through a year of growing, milling and baking.

Small-scale equipment to sow and then to thresh, clean and mill the home-grown grains.

Training and support for groups to host their own breadmaking session using their home-grown wheat.

Advice at each stage, from sowing to baking, and collates the findings from each of the groups.

In May 2016, the first Soil To Slice community growers gathered to share their experiences of growing heritage wheat, hear an update on Scotland The Bread’s nutrient research and get a little hands-on experience baking with some of the heritage flour.

Growing grain on this small scale in urban plots isn’t going to create a viable supply of flour for any community – although it’s worth remembering that a plot of just eight by ten metres can produce enough wheat to make bread for one person for a full year. However, even a tiny patch of wheat can change the way we think of our growing spaces and their connection with our food.

Abundant possibilities spring up when we are invited to re-imagine the way we ‘do’ bread and to formulate ideas to suit our unique, local circumstance. Possibilities such as: a community-scale micro-bakery to serve a school, a clinic or a care home; a peri-urban farm to supply freshly-milled flour to a local food network; a community to share its breadmaking skills and varied cultural traditions, creating real jobs in meaningful work as it does so; a local authority or NHS Trust to give nourishing bread a central place in its public procurement.

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