

# Food and Health on Scottish Islands

*A networking conference  
for island communities*

23 October 2003  
Glasgow



Scottish Community  
Diet Project

*Supporting local  
communities tackling  
inequalities in  
diet and health*

## **Contents**

Summary	2
Introduction: Food access, the SCDP and the islands	4
What's happening on the islands?	5
Barra	
Bute	
Islay	
Mull and Iona	
Orkney	
Skye	
Small Isles	
Western Isles	
Barriers to healthier food access on islands	13
Feeding back the experience of island life to agencies	17
What can be done?	18
Community action	
Getting the message across	
Responses from the Agency panel	
Contacts	24
Agencies	
Participants	
Publications	26
Acknowledgements	28

## Summary

*'We are all Scottish but we are a little bit different on the islands in all sorts of ways.'*

The Food and Health on Scottish Islands networking conference for island communities was organised by the Scottish Community Diet Project. The event took place in Glasgow on 23 October 2003. There were fifteen participants including community, health, enterprise and council representatives from the Isles of Barra, Bute, Islay, Mull and Iona, Orkney, Skye and Lochalsh, the Small Isles and the Western Isles, with particularly strong representation from different projects on Skye.

The aims of the conference were:

- to share information on what was happening in the islands in terms of food and health
- to discuss the barriers to healthier food access on the islands
- to examine the role of community action
- to identify ways of 'getting the message across'
- to feed back the findings of the conference to key agency representatives and to island communities themselves.

The conference revealed that although the islands share, in broad terms, many of the barriers to accessing healthy food found in other parts of Scotland – ie availability, affordability, culture and skills - the issues differ in the detail, even within islands.

The remoteness of the islands, from both the mainland and public and private sector decision-makers, was an issue for some in terms of transport, communication and understanding, and in ensuring equity of service. The cost of living (perceived to be higher on the islands); a lack of competition amongst supermarkets; problems in accessing appropriate levels of funding; and the limits of small-scale production, all contribute to a distinctly 'island' picture.

A wide range of projects is underway across the islands to try to address the barriers to healthier food access, engaging interest in growing and cooking local produce and bringing elements of the community together in stimulating the food economy. As a result, there is a wealth of new and traditional skills and experience within the islands, which could be developed and shared. However, real understanding and support are required to enable these communities to overcome the particular transport, cultural and communication difficulties they experience, in order to make the most of what could be achieved.

The conference revealed that while there is a wealth of experience available to be shared among island communities, some areas face practical and cultural challenges which are distinct to their particular communities - and they do not always have the skills and resources available locally to facilitate this.

The conference's overall message to policy-makers was twofold: 'We need long-term support, a long-term strategy and evaluation.' However, 'there is no one grand overall plan that is going to fit absolutely everything.'

## **Introduction**

### **Food access, the SCDP and the islands**

*Bill Gray, National Project Officer of the Scottish Community Diet Project (SCDP)*

'In 1996, the Community Action section of the Scottish Diet Action Plan specifically highlighted the importance of meeting the needs of island communities. Ensuring that these communities are included in the national diet strategy requires resources and support. The remit of the Scottish Community Diet Project includes remote and isolated rural communities and gradually, as staffing and resources have increased, the SCDP has become better able to support a steady increase in the involvement of the islands. This has been reflected in the readership of the SCDP's newsletter, *Fare Choice*, in the greater number of articles appearing from Scotland's islands and in the increasing demand from the islands for financial help through the small grant scheme. Conference attendance has also increased, with more people from island communities taking part in national events, training opportunities and study tours. Staff from the SCDP have visited Islay, Orkney, Shetland, Skye and the Western Isles, and would welcome further opportunities to visit the more hard-to-reach islands.

The island communities are part of the big picture: Scotland. They share common themes with other communities, rural and urban - but equally there are distinctions, differences in experiences and language. The logistics are different. The entire community is different in a geographical sense. There are cultural issues, pressures on island communities and barriers which have a particular island dimension - but quite often, there are the same barriers as those found on the mainland. On the mainland the issue might be that it takes two buses to reach a shop selling fruit and vegetables - on some islands the issue might be: 'What bus?'

The island communities have something to offer as well as gain by being involved nationally.'

## **What's happening on the islands?**

Participants provided a brief, informal overview of what was happening in their areas, on their islands. The length and content of each report reflects the role of the speaker, the number of delegates representing different agencies on island communities and the time constraints of the conference.

### **BARRA**

*'We have got one (supermarket) where sometimes you can't get bread or milk never mind fresh fruit and vegetables... One of my friends has just bought her own poly tunnel, the doctor has got a poly tunnel, that is going to be the big thing, a poly tunnel.'* Frances MacNeill, Community Nurse

Barra has a population of approximately 1300 and is 'very much a crofting community'. There is a school and a small hospital but fishing and crofting are the main occupations. Many people grow potatoes or carrots, keep hens and fish for mackerel. There are local produce sales once a month. We have got a person who slaughters beef and the airport café offers organic cakes, fruit and juices. Further information from Frances MacNeill (see page 25).

### **BUTE**

#### **Bute Healthy Living Initiative**

*'The first step we have taken is the community allotment. It is an organic allotment.'* Lynda Russell-Hyde

*'Workers from the allotment have access to the food they grow and they will also be able to exchange fresh produce for a meal in our community café.'* Yennie van Oostende, Co-ordinator.

Bute Healthy Living Initiative is a new project, set up in May 2003, which is working closely with the local training and education initiative in the development of a community allotment, the Garden Crew Project. The Garden Crew was launched in 2002 as a food-growing project which aimed to increase access to fresh affordable food and promote the development of practical gardening skills amongst target groups in the Ballochgoy SIP area of Rothesay. A grant from the Scottish Community Diet Project was used to buy tools, seeds, compost and building materials. A garden shed was built, involving trainees from a local training scheme under the Get Ready For Work Programme. The garden grows a variety of vegetables, herbs and flowers which are supplied each week to the Link Community Club, for lunch, dinner and cookery programmes. Members of the Crew have access to fresh produce from the allotment. The Healthy Living Initiative is working in partnership with the Step Up Project to expand the garden and to encourage the development of more allotments and 'grow your own' on Bute.

Other Healthy Living activities on the island include: a Healthy Living Day with herb tasting, recipes and demonstrations; a community café, a series of cookery courses and a breakfast club. For further information contact Lynda Russell-Hyde or Yennie van Oostende (see page 25).

## **ISLAY**

### **Islay Disabled Endeavours and Action (IDEA)**

*'We have three acres of land let out to us by one of our member's family, which we are using to grow vegetables... We are linking up with Argyll College and hope to offer horticultural training. To this end we are purchasing three large glass domes, 26 feet in diameter.'* Angus Rice

IDEA was set up in 1992 by parents and carers to campaign for facilities on the island for those with physical, learning and mental difficulties. In 1997 the voluntary group entered into a partnership agreement with the Social Work Department of Argyll and Bute Council. The centre now employs five members of staff and three sessional workers, operating three days a week. IDEA's many projects include:

- a gardening team which takes on contracts for local horticultural projects and helps out in the gardens of those no longer able to manage for themselves.
- restoring a Victorian walled garden which has five acres to grow vegetables, a fruit garden and a glasshouse. The garden will be linked to the old home farm, which is being restored as a skill and craft centre.
- an old people's lunch club, held two days a week.

For further information contact Angus Rice (page 25).

### **Islay Healthy Living Centre**

A Healthy Living Centre has been established on Islay, with funding for the next three years. The Centre is linked into the NHS Trust, the local Health Board, Social Work and schools. Public health nurses visit the schools to talk about diet, alcohol, sexual issues and all aspects of healthy living. A Young Scot project has allowed school pupils to take advantage of discounts on public transport and other facilities on the island and on the mainland, helping the team to engage with and educate many young people.

For further information contact Carol Muir, Islay Healthy Living Centre, Bowmore, Islay, Tel: 01496 810693.

## **MULL AND IONA**

### **Mull and Iona Community Trust**

*'Local people who used to go to the (supermarket), which is the one and only store that we have, are now buying their neighbour's meat and it is readily available... We put £3,000 back into the account in the first year just by using local meat.'* Susie Chalupa,

Mull and Iona Community Trust was set up as a charity in 1997, with initial funding from the Lottery. It oversees a wide range of activities, including a community meat business and a food festival, supported by the Green Future project. The meat business began when the local butcher closed down. The Trust approached the Scottish Land Fund and bought the shop. The shop now operates as a profitable community business, selling four local beef carcasses a week (compared to the one 'imported' carcass sold by the previous butcher) and twenty local lamb. The Trust employs a full-time slaughter man 'who does other things too because obviously slaughtering can be seasonal.'

In three years, the Food Festival has grown from a one day event to a highly successful, week-long programme involving many local businesses, including restaurants, hotels and producers. Local chefs give cookery demonstrations showcasing local produce. They have also contributed to a book of traditional recipes which is being sold to raise money for a swimming pool. A chef who gave schoolchildren a series of eight cookery lessons, has been an inspiration. 'Now they all want to be chefs. The school is really thrilled, they said they had never seen attention like this - and because of that we have had other chefs saying can we do sessions all the year round.' There has been an upsurge of interest in local produce. Producer markets are now held every fortnight. For further information contact Susie Chalupa (see page 25).

## **ORKNEY**

### **Orkney Council**

*'Oradians are farmers with a boat, Shetlanders are fishermen with a piece of land.'*  
Dawn Sherwood, Health Promotion.

Orkney is remote from the Scottish mainland. Access by ferry or air is expensive. The majority of the 19,000 population live in two towns on the biggest island, Kirkwall and Stromness. However, there are communities scattered around sixteen other islands within the Orkney group. This presents a logistical challenge in that food which is not produced locally is usually transported many miles, through Inverness to Thurso and on to Scrabster into Stromness, where it is trucked to Kirkwall for distribution to the smaller islands. Depopulation and an ageing population are issues. A number of the outer islands have experienced a 30% drop in population as young people leave the communities.



Orkney has a proud tradition of producing food locally, including beef, fish, shellfish, ice cream, cheese, whisky and wine. 'We promote ourselves on the basis of quality and freshness of our produce.' There are a number of farmers' markets held every year, an annual food festival and an awards scheme. Orkney Island Council, NHS Orkney, the local enterprise company and the voluntary sector work in partnership to find ways to promote and improve the diet, eg a multi-agency roadshow visited three of the islands. In Kirkwall, a grant from the Scottish Community Diet Project allowed people in the Papdale housing estate to receive subsidised fruit, through a community shop. Although Papdale has two supermarkets, they are not readily accessible to older people in sheltered housing and parents without cars, because the estate is situated on a hill. Local people are being encouraged to increase the amount of fruit in their diet through a combination of tastings, in-store promotions, recipes and cut-price fruit. Further information from Dawn Sherwood (see page 25).

## **SKYE**

*'There is nothing butchered and only a little finished on Skye, all the meat is slaughtered elsewhere. It doesn't come back to Skye. The same with fish. Almost without exception, shellfish and fish gets exported off the island.'*

### **Skye and Lochalsh Horticultural Development Association**

*'People say "I need a poly tunnel before I can grow anything," but that is not true. Poly tunnels are very nice but you don't really need them to get started. Get some vegetables into the ground, just basic potatoes, carrots, root vegetables, even for your own use.'* Calina Macdonald

The Horticultural Development Association was established in 1994 by a group representing the local council, Scottish Agricultural College, crofters and others, who realised that 100% of food consumed in the area was imported, resulting in poor quality and choice. The Association wanted fresher, more flavoursome and healthier food – 'food grown locally, by local people for local consumption.' The challenge was to convince crofters who had moved away from self-sufficiency with the arrival of supermarkets, that growing vegetables for sale was profitable. The Association set about educating the local community through schools and community groups. It now holds regular meetings, training sessions and courses, including an open management committee meeting every month. It has become involved in bulk buying compost, seed potatoes, horticultural supplies and poly tunnels to secure more competitive prices for its members. A weekly market stall runs from July to the end of September and permission has been granted to hold a farmers' market in the centre of Portree. Membership has grown from 10 in 1994 to 110 in 2003. Current aims focus on increasing the number of market stall sites and sales, following a rise of 21% in 2001-2002; the number of growers and producers; the processing of value-added products by eg turning strawberries and raspberries into jam; 'exports' to other communities through farmers' markets; and the education of children and adults to buy local goods

rather than add 'food miles.' For further information contact Calina Macdonald (see page 25).

### **Food and Drink Initiative**

*'Producers are working together to market each other's products through the food van and through farmers' markets.'* Carole Inglis

The Skye and Lochalsh Food and Drink Initiative began when the local enterprise agency employed a project officer to promote food and tourism through a food and drink directory and a food festival. It became apparent through working on these projects that there was an opportunity to promote local produce to consumers. Fifty percent of local people were employed in the hotel, restaurant, agriculture and fishing industries. The Soil Association's Food Futures programme provided a way forward. It encouraged the development of a shared vision - a local food strategy which could strengthen the food economy, increasing access to fresh local food. A conference was held, featuring local produce, which discussed local demand and supply, regulation, environmental concerns, marketing/branding, distribution and education about access to local food. Three action groups were set up, relating to meat (reflecting the lack of abattoir facilities), distribution, and marketing. Their achievements to date include: a group of growers running box schemes, a foodlink van (see below), a producers' market, the formation of a Food and Learning Alliance, inter-agency co-operation on eg food hygiene, better cross-sectoral communication, improved branding and promotion, encouraging quality assurance. The community has seen a renewal of pride in traditional crofting through successful diversification. For further information contact Carole Inglis (see page 25).

### **Skye and Lochalsh Food Link Van**

*'One of the problems was distribution. We all scratched our heads and said, we can't do anything - and then somebody got up and they said, I'll get it off the ground, I'll drive a van. It went from there.'* Deirdre Peppe

The Skye and Lochalsh Food Link Van was launched by a group of producers in 2000 in an attempt to overcome the problems of transporting local produce around the many peninsulas, which is 'about 100 miles from the northern to the southern tips and not quite as much from the west to the east in Lochalsh.' Initially a volunteer drove the van in return for the cost of his petrol but that was not sustainable so he is now paid. In the first year, over £8,000 worth of goods was carried on the van. In 2001 that rose to nearly £20,000. In 2002 it was nearly £35,000 and by September 2003 the figure was nearly £45,000. The van is used to transport local food from producers to hotels and restaurants, and carries boxed goods such as vegetables. The route serves two big producers, west and east, with collections and deliveries there, back and in between. There is scope for a north-south run. Initially the project received funding from Skye and Lochalsh Enterprise, the SCDP and Sustainable Scotland (2001-2). It has also attracted support from European funds, the Highland Council and the Scottish Executive and aims to be

sustainable by 2006. For further information contact Deirdre Peppe (see page 25).

### **Permaculture Group**

*'If you put heart into the soil you put heart into the community.'* Sandra Masson

Rubha Phoil forest garden on the Sleat peninsula of Skye is a permaculture demonstration site which grows and sells organic vegetables, herbs, seeds, specialist plants and young trees. Permaculture may be defined as an ecological approach to simple, sustainable living. The fifteen acre site consists of peaty woodland which has undergone drainage, planting and building of a poly tunnel, workshop, shop and dwellings using traditional materials wherever possible. Recycling is an important feature. The gardens and nature walks attract tourists and students. Organic herbs are the easiest plants to grow and there is a thriving market – 'It isn't a problem really, sowing ...growing. We need more growers. The market's out there.' A raised bed allows the cultivation of larger vegetables'. Nuts, blackcurrants, raspberries and beans are grown in the forest garden. The community has crofting status and, since its inception in 1990, it has worked with Skye Horticultural Development Association, the Soil Association, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Forestry Authority and the Crofters Commission in the development of its plans. For further information contact Sandra Masson (see page 25).

### **Sleat Community Trust**

Sleat Community Trust aims to work towards the social, economic and environmental rejuvenation of the Sleat peninsula, in south Skye. Sleat is a small community of 800. The nearest supermarket and petrol station are fifteen miles away. There are about forty children at the school, an active parent teacher association and the doctors in the community have children, so there has been some debate about nutrition and school meals. The Trust is considering investing in a community poly tunnel, where the children could learn to grow vegetables, eat them and be taught their nutritional value. It is hoped that this will prompt an upward movement of information from children to parents. For further information contact David Ritchie (see page 25).

### **Portree Hospital**

*'My real passion at the moment is trying to put health promotion messages across to people that are specific to the needs of the community... to Scottish culture and Island culture.'*  
Jill Gormanley, dietician

Recognising that the 'healthy eating' message does not always capture and maintain the interest of the public, the dietician at Portree Hospital has adopted a fun approach to health promotion, by 'putting messages across to people that are specific to the needs of the community.' Posters advertising Portree Slimmers reflect the local habit of having 'tea and a pancake' with the heading 'Too many strùpags?' – or make a play on the Gaelic word for stomach, bru, in a poster entitled 'Have You Lost Your Irn Bru?'

For further information contact Jill Gormanley (see page 25).

## **SMALL ISLES**

### **Lochaber Health for All**

*'One of the lost skills is that young people don't know how to use seafood, they don't know how to cook seaweed and things like that.'* Nancy Campbell.

Lochaber Health for All Partnership is based in Fort William and covers the Small Isles - Rum, Eigg, Muck and Canna - and Moidart. The partnership is involved in a Food for Thought project, led by Voluntary Action Lochaber, which looks at (i) health issues in community courses and (ii) food production eg market gardens, food co-operatives and the use of wild foods eg fish and seaweed. 'Young people no longer have the skills to harvest and cook these foods. Perhaps other islanders can help.' The Small Isles rely on the supermarket in Mallaig packaging up food and sending it out on the ferry, which is not reliable.

For further information contact Nancy Campbell (see page 25).

## **WESTERN ISLES**

### **Fas Fallain**

*'A business plan has been drawn up for a community-owned company which will provide fresh food for much of Stornoway.'* Mary Maclean, Manager Healthy Living Centre

The Western Isles are less self-sufficient than they used to be since fruit and vegetables became available in supermarkets. Subsistence has become associated with poverty. The crofters' focus is on livestock. Fas Fallain (Grow Healthy) Healthy Living Centre aims to encourage the local community to grow its own food and to get involved in berry-growing to supplement its income. It is working in partnership with the Scottish Agricultural College (SAC) and Lewes Castle College to develop a Scottish Vocational Qualification – a two-year SVQ2 in Commercial Horticulture. Two poly tunnels have been set up which provide employment and which are being used in the SVQ course. One of the local primary schools is being encouraged to develop a garden; the produce will be used in domestic science classes. Fas Fallain also supports a mental health drop-in centre, 'Catch 23', which has received funding to run healthy-eating cookery courses and develop an organic kitchen garden, which will be maintained by clients. The garden will provide fresh produce for a regular lunch club.

Further information from Mary Maclean (see page 25).

## **Cearns Community Development Project**

*'It is all down to getting the kids involved, once we do that, that is us.'* Laura Ross,  
*Labourer*

Cearns Community Development Project, Stornoway, uses the two poly tunnels mentioned above to grow herbs, vegetables and strawberries which are sold for profit. The project has taken the initiative in the community by knocking on doors, asking elderly and disabled people if they would like help with their gardens. Laura Ross, a labourer in the project, was one of the first students to begin the SVQ in Commercial Horticulture. She sees involving local children as an important issue. 'I have always had the interest in a croft... It is a delight to wake up in the morning to go to work and do something that other people will get pleasure out of... Hopefully if we can get the kids involved too, we are laughing. The local kids they are very interested, they come in and see our big spiders!'

Further information from Laura Ross or Mary Maclean (see page 25).

## **Barriers to healthier food access on islands**

### **A overview of the barriers**

Emma Witney, Programme Manager Communities, NHS Health Scotland

*'I was delighted when asked to take part today. It has been really good to hear what is happening. Food on the islands has always been an issue.'*

'The Scottish Diet Action Plan gave the first expression of the barriers to healthy living in terms of policy. It listed the barriers as availability, affordability, culture and skills. These 'categories' are now taken for granted: then, it was quite a breakthrough. The benefit of thinking in these terms is that it allows policy-makers and community-practitioners to identify where there is commonality and where there is difference, which helps in finding solutions. These barriers can be used as a framework for looking at island-related issues.

There are big areas of commonality between the islands and the mainland eg issues relating to commercial retailers have similarities for both island and rural areas. Affordability of good food is an issue in island communities - especially in terms of food miles - and it is an issue in other areas. Culture plays a part in defining a healthy diet and in social attitudes to 'grow your own' whether you live on an island or in a city. Skills, for community networking for example, vary in all communities.

The question is: is there an 'island view' that needs to be articulated to policy-makers?

In 1995 I was involved with a research project as part of what was then Health Education Board for Scotland's Community Participation in Health Needs Assessment programme, entitled Food Availability and Choice in Remote and Rural Areas. The research identified key barriers to making healthy choices in the Southern Isles. They were:

- low levels of disposable income and high cost of foodstuffs
- limited choice and availability of healthy foods, especially fruit and vegetables
- conflicting definitions of what constitutes a healthy diet
- the importance of food-centred social activities
- the potentially negative influence of pro-tobacco and alcohol advertising campaigns
- changing work patterns
- changes in social and gender relations in rural society.

Despite great advances generally in awareness about food health, there is still some resonance with that list in the islands. The Health Education Board have combined with the Public Health Institute for Scotland to become NHS Health Scotland and are keen to continue working with island communities.'

## **Barriers to healthier food access on the islands, as perceived by participants**

The perceived barriers to good nutrition in the islands were examined by delegates through discussion groups. Their comments are summarised here under the headings of availability, affordability, culture and skills.

One group of participants opened its discussions by noting that 'Barriers may be interpreted as opportunities' - for example 'Disadvantaged is the terminology of funding applications... a vehicle into funding.'

### **AVAILABILITY**

- Transport is a major barrier.
- Availability of fresh products through the supermarkets is poor, especially in winter.
- Seasonality can impact hugely on small producers and developing local food economies, with specific issue for the islands in terms of growing, transport and employment.
- Scale of production is a factor in terms of producers, suppliers, consumer demand.
- Local growing and supply could be developed much further with support from government. Local management of school meals could be a key factor and is reflected in differences between islands.
- The local infrastructure is crucial to local food production and achieving national policies. The lack of local slaughterhouse facilities was seen as a key issue in some areas.
- How to make food grown for hotels, restaurants or export more readily available to local consumers?

### **AFFORDABILITY**

#### **Cost of living**

Island wages outside the public sector tend to be lower than those on the mainland and the cost of services can be higher, so people have less disposable income to spend on food. The economy is more depressed in some island communities than others.

The rural price index, which compares the price of a basket of food on the islands to the nearest big town (eg Aberdeen) was believed to show that the price of food on some islands is approximately 10% greater than in the city.

### **Transport**

Fuel is more expensive in the islands (again estimated at approximately 10%). Transport costs are high. These costs are passed on to consumers. 'Skye has the most expensive toll bridge in the world.'

Ferries are not simply extensions of the road and railway networks. They are weather-dependent and can be unreliable. Sea miles are food miles too!

### **Competition**

There is little, if any, competition amongst large retailers on the islands. The Co-op is often the only supermarket, although some islands eg Shetland, Orkney and Skye also have a Safeway store.

### **Producing food for sale**

Producing food on a small scale can cost more, especially when transporting raw materials, seeds, compost, seed potatoes etc from the mainland. There are different weather and soil conditions on the islands and production is low intensity rather than high intensity.

## **CULTURE**

*'In some island communities you still have the belief that a healthy diet is a good slab of cheese in the morning and plenty of lard in your frying pan.'*

### **Dietary habits**

Some island communities still believe in traditional but outdated food values, involving high fat content. Although fresh fruit and vegetables have become more readily available in some areas, it can be difficult to break the culture of not eating fruit and vegetables. 'People's diet has been limited in the past and culture takes a while to catch up with improved availability.' In some cases, this may be related to the poor quality/high price of fresh produce. Islanders work hard, often outdoors in harsh weather, travelling some distances. Convenience is an island issue.

### **Local perceptions**

Island produce is often of good quality but in some areas it tends to be exported or reserved for tourists, eg seafood. Local produce is perceived as more expensive.

### **External perceptions**

Private and public sectors lack real understanding of island circumstances. Public service boundaries and the location of regional or national Headquarters can undermine equity of service. Regulation and legislation tend to reflect mainland circumstances.



Some funding bodies seem to prefer larger-scale funding bids than those required for small populations. Sometimes, small amounts of money over a longer period would be more helpful.

## **SKILLS**

*‘There is differing experience in terms of activism and apathy.’*

Perceptions varied but different delegates reported a shortage of skills, volunteers, volunteers with skills, and/or local training opportunities for staff or volunteers amongst the islands.

Local skills and/or training which were identified as desirable were:

- training in horticulture and agriculture
- skills for caterers eg how to use cheaper cuts of meat but retain quality
- skills in community-partnership working
- how to harvest and cook wild food
- how to cook new crops or those usually harvested for tourist markets eg seafood, artichokes and pak choi
- cookery for school children, unemployed/low income, single people and widowed men.

## **Feeding back the experience of island life to agencies**

### **Why is feeding back important?**

Drew Ratter, Scottish Consumer Council member and Chairman, Economic Development, Shetland Islands Council

'Demand for good food applies right across social boundaries. Jack McConnell, the First Minister, is very interested in food health and the creation of the post of Scottish Food and Health Co-ordinator reflects this. Food health is a priority across Scotland. However, the islands experience a different set of circumstances which need to be taken into consideration. They are remote, which affects costs and availability. Food production tends to be relatively small-scale. Small-scale production is difficult for public procurers to handle but island communities can deliver good value, fresh food of high quality and that is important for health and the local economy. The public sector is very important in the islands. It feeds people in schools and hospitals and it employs a large percentage of the population, either directly or indirectly as suppliers. The key to supplying the public sector is flexibility in regulation.

In the past, compulsory competitive tendering forced people to buy on the basis of price. This has been replaced by Best Value, which is hard to define but can be used to support local buying, for example local food may be the fresher option. EU regulations impact on public procurement contracts but these regulations have been implemented slightly differently by different countries. In Italy, schools are using locally produced food – not by specifying that it has been produced locally, but by specifying their requirements relating to quality and taste.

Community planning is another positive development. It represents a serious attempt by the government to encourage agencies and projects to work together on local solutions, to make improvements for local communities. Hence the importance of feeding back to agencies. They need to understand the issues. Understanding and partnership working will not happen overnight. It will require the building of long-term relationships and it will take some time to filter down to operational levels. But I can see real benefits for local economies in the political environment at this time.'

For more information on Community Planning see publications on page 27.

## What can be done?

Participants formed two discussion groups to focus on the role of community action and the task of getting the message across. Their findings were reported to a panel of agency representatives, chaired by Drew Ratter (see above). On the panel were: Shona Allison, Key Industries Development Manager, The Highlands & Islands Enterprise; Tor Justad, Highlands and Islands Co-ordinator, Scottish Co-op; Gillian Kynoch, Scottish Food and Health Co-ordinator, Scottish Executive; Pamela Reid, Head of Diet and Nutrition Branch, Food Standards Agency Scotland (for contact details of all panellists see page 24) .

### Community Action

*‘The perception of the culture of the islands is of communities not being able to work together because in different parts of the island, they all have their own wee cliques and so on.’*

#### Barriers

Participants felt strongly that, in order to bring about real change in diet and local food economies, community action requires appropriate levels of sustainable funding. Given the small scale of the populations on the islands, a relatively small amount of funding over a longer period is often most effective but less easy to acquire. Some funding bodies prefer to grant a small number of big awards, rather than administer a number of small ones.

Projects were often funded for one to three years but ‘you need a minimum of five years when you are trying to change a whole way of life.’ ‘Just as the project has started to make some sense, you have to divert your time and energy to looking for funding to keep the project going. It is time-consuming, frustrating, soul destroying and it takes all the oomph out of the drive and initiative that you started off with. You just think to yourself, is it worth going on?’

Local projects need national government to make provision for relating public health to the community, not just to Scotland. ‘Public health within the islands varies from island to island. It is historical, it is a cultural thing. You have got to be aware as funders that these issues are there and we have got to work with them, alongside them.’ (See Getting the message across, page 20).

#### Opportunities

At a local level, community action requires:

- **Community involvement**  
Everyone has to get involved. There is no point in just one organisation or one individual coming up with a good idea and then saying, right this is what I think and I am going to start putting it together. It will inevitably fail, simply because you do not have

community involvement. In particular, agencies need to work together to address the barriers to accessing healthier food eg through community planning partnerships.

- **Communication**

Members of the community are all entitled to have their own voice. Communication issues facing island communities vary from island to island but they include:

- transportation
- no provision for broadband for linking up with computers
- inadequate provision for radio and television. Some places on the islands still do not have television and there is no provision being made to allow the islands to receive digital broadcasts at the moment.

- **Flexibility in recognising the scale and seasonality of food production**

Experiences on several of the islands show that local producers 'can supply the local communities on a seasonal basis.' This includes supplying local businesses and farmers' markets. Large-scale supply requires more long-term support, planning, co-operation and commitment. 'There is no point in a community trying to start a co-operative looking to sell to local schools, hospitals and so on unless they have sustainable long-term production.' However, government support and flexible regulation in terms of supplying food to local schools and hospitals could help.

- **Share experiences**

*'You can learn lots of lessons from like-minded folk who have done similar things.'*

## **Getting the message across**

*'I want to learn as much as I can today and take that back to our community.'* Nancy Campbell

*'When I go back (after this event) I am actually hoping to network.'* Frances MacNeill

The picture is very mixed among the islands in terms of the strength of the local food economy, infrastructure, land quality, culture, access to EU grants, planning and payment for farmers' markets, etc. Food and drink can cross or fall between remits such as health and social inclusion. There is no ring-fencing in place, 'no consistency between enterprise companies for instance.' 'Decision-makers are too remote from the reality on the ground.'

The key messages which need to be put across are:

- Food is life

- Good food for all, not just some
- Buy fresh and local
- We're listening

It is important that food is understood and appreciated, not seen as a 'pill' for health but as important in all aspects of life, including social, environmental and economic. Everyone is entitled to access good healthy food, wherever they live. Local produce has fewer food miles and growing and buying fresh food helps to sustain the local economy.

Getting the message across at all levels means 'better understanding and appreciation by everyone, whether schoolchild, civil servant, minister, parents, retailers, media.' Delegates identified four levels of people to whom a series of messages needs to be addressed:

- individuals
- local communities
- local agencies including local authorities and enterprise agencies
- national agencies including the Scottish Executive.

Participants felt that local communities, local agencies and national agencies need to work together and that the policy level needs to move to a more local focus. This is already beginning to happen. However, policy-makers tend to draft reports and legislation and then send it out to the community for consultation, rather than speak and – more importantly – listen to people first. Genuine two-way communication is important in order to achieve realistic solutions. Participants need a clear understanding of their role in the consultation and implementation process. 'Recognition from Scottish Executive down does help.'

Community planning could provide a key mechanism for getting the message across and may be relatively easy to achieve in small island communities.

Relevant and appropriate marketing is important. Positive scientific evidence should define messages about what constitutes good food, in terms of advertising and lobbying, rather than commercial influences. National budgets could contain a local allocation for locally-targeted advertising.

Schools and school meals have an important part to play. Island children may travel some distance to school. Some island initiatives are encouraging cookery courses in school or an interest in growing in community gardens or poly tunnels. Risk assessment has different implications in crofting communities - the educational value of visiting a farm may far outweigh any risk of infection from E. coli.

Overall, the issue is not just getting the messages across but acting on the messages. It is then important to match reality with rhetoric, to provide

enough good food to supply the demand. This will require long-term strategy and evaluation.

### **Messages for communities**

- There are solutions, ideas, experience and examples of good practice in the islands which could become common island practice.
- Working together as a community can benefit everyone.
- Recognise that the onus is on us to market ourselves and to say 'This is what I can do for you – what can you do for me?'
- 'Make use of the fact that we are small communities. We can do a lot one-to-one. Sometimes projects may not work but we can still learn from them.'

### **Messages for public agencies**

*'We need long-term support, a long-term strategy and evaluation.'*

- Evaluate the progress of the Scottish Diet Action Plan in island communities.
- Reduce the pressure on island communities in terms of transport costs.
- Provide long-term support for sustainability. A minimum of five years' funding is necessary for any large-scale project.
- School meals: local procurement could improve quality and have a knock-on effect at home.
- Local infrastructure is fundamental to achieving national policy eg transport, communications, access to slaughterhouses.
- Understand the differences. 'Someone said that Scots eat too many takeaways but they are a luxury when it's forty miles to the nearest fish and chip shop.'

### **Messages for caterers and retailers**

- Sell local produce without huge mark-ups.
- Give greater priority to healthy eating (not just lip service).
- Improve the quality of cheaper food.
- Be more aware of what is available locally and when, in terms of customers and suppliers.

- Allocate a percentage of your profits to supporting local island food production.
- You control what we eat! Listen to local consumers and local producers. Allow local supermarket managers to deviate from 'the list'.

## **Responses from the panel**

### **Highlands and Islands Enterprise**

Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) has commissioned a study to look into expanding Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) in the region. CSA represents a partnership between small farmers or crofters – both livestock and crop producers – and local consumers who want to eat fresh food. By joining a CSA, families sign up to be 'members' of a farm or croft in their area. The farmer or crofter agrees to grow or rear a range of food that the members want, with a budget for the year. Members pay for a year's 'share' of the food then produced. Shona Allison, a Development Manager within HIE's Key Industries team, says: 'We wanted to know if CSAs could be feasible in the Highlands and Islands, providing healthy, locally produced food to residents and providing a guaranteed income for small crofts and farms.' A summary report will be available on request from late summer 2004. HIE are currently liaising with other local public sector agencies to determine the levels of support and resources available in order to action the CSA delivery proposals.

### **The Co-op**

The Co-op's representative on the panel, Tor Justad, responded to questions about the cost and supply of food in stores on the islands by saying: 'The way that our freight costs work for transporting our goods to our shops is evened out on a UK basis so there is no extra loading on to islands as far as cost.' In addition: 'We have two price bands and they are the same wherever you go in the UK. The price bands that operate in the islands are appropriate for the size of store they apply to.' With regard to stocking local produce: 'Our local sourcing office is based in Manchester. You can phone or speak to them directly. I put the organic growers, for example, in direct touch with the person in Manchester about supplying our store in Lerwick with organic lamb for example.'

### **The Scottish Executive**

After listening to the feedback from the day, Gillian Kynoch, the food and health co-ordinator for Scotland explained that she felt that the islanders are the people who best understand the barriers they face to a healthy diet. Gillian recognised the benefits of islanders learning from each other's experiences.

## **The Food Standards Agency**

The Food Standards Agency's representative on the panel, Pamela Reid, recognised that islanders faced additional difficulties in sourcing the appropriate support and legislative information to help with producing and processing food. She explained that the Food Standards Agency Scotland was keen to find out more about the issues facing food producers on the Scottish islands. She encouraged islanders to play an active part in shaping future food law by feeding views into consultations at the early stages of European discussion rather than finding out too late that changes in regulations will have a negative impact on their food access.



## **Contacts**

### **Agencies**

#### Highlands & Islands Enterprise

Shona Allison, Key Industries Development Manager, Highlands & Islands Enterprise, Tel 01463 244255 E-mail shona.Allison@hient.co.uk

#### Scottish Co-op

Tor Justad, Co-operative Affairs Officer, Scottish Co-op, 74 Telford Street, Inverness IV3 5LS. Tel/fax: 01463 717292. E-mail: tor.justard@co-op.co.uk

#### Scottish Executive Health Department

Gillian Kynoch, Scottish Food and Health Co-ordinator, Room 2ES, HISD, Scottish Executive Health Department, St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG. Tel: 0131 244 4387.

E-mail: gillian.kynoch@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

#### The Big Partnership

Kim Munro, Account Manager, The Big Partnership, Beresford House, 5 Claremont Terrace, Glasgow G3 7XR. Tel: 0141 333 9585. Fax: 0141 333 9584. E-mail: kim@bigpartnership.co.uk

#### Shetland Islands Council

Drew Ratter, Chairman, Economic Development, Shetland Islands Council, Town Hall, Lerwick, Shetland ZE1 0HB. Tel: 01595 744514. Fax: 01595 744521. E-mail: drew.ratter@shetland.gov.uk

#### Food Standards Agency Scotland

Pamela Reid, Head of Policy, Food Standards, Diet and Nutrition, Food Standards Agency Scotland, St Magnus House, Guild Street, Aberdeen AB11 6NJ Tel 01224 285100 Fax 01224 285168

E-mail pamela.reid@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

#### NHS Health Scotland

Emma Witney, Programme Manager, Communities, NHS Health Scotland, Woodburn House, Canaan Lane, Edinburgh EH10 4SG. Tel 0131 536 5500.

## **Participants**

Angus Rice, IDEAS, Bowmore, Islay. Tel: 01496 810963

Calina Macdonald, Skye & Lochalsh Horticultural Development, Carbost, Isle of Skye. Tel: 01478 640276

Carole Inglis, Skye & Lochalsh Enterprise, Portree, Isle of Skye. Tel: 01478 612841

David Ritchie, Sleat Community Trust, Isle of Skye. Tel: 01471 833458

Dawn Sherwood, Orkney Islands Council, Kirkwall, Orkney. Tel: 01856 873535

Deirdre Peppe, Skye & Lochalsh Food Link Van, Carbost, Isle of Skye. Tel: 01478 640218

Frances MacNeill, Community Nursing Service, Castlebay, Isle of Barra. Tel: 01871 810893

Jill Gormanley, Portree Hospital, Portree, Isle of Skye. Tel: 01478 613200

Laura Ross, Cearns Community Development Project, Stornoway, Western Isles. Tel: 01851 701909

Lynda Russell-Hyde, Bute Healthy Living Initiative, Rothesay, Isle of Bute. Tel: 01700 505501

Mary Maclean, Fas Fallain, Stornoway, Western Isles. Tel: 01851 701545

Nancy Campbell, Lochaber Health for All, Fort William, Small Isles. Tel: 01397 700746

Sandra Masson, Skye & Lochalsh Permaculture Group, Isle of Skye. Tel: 01471 844700.

Susie Chalupa, Mull & Iona Community Trust, Tobermory, Mull. Tel: 01688 302851

Yennie van Oostende, Bute Healthy Living Initiative, Rothesay, Isle of Bute. Tel: 01700 505501

## **Publications**

The following publications were available at the seminar. They are listed here under the organisations from which they are available.

Argyll and Clyde Council:

Bute Healthy Living Initiative

Cearns Community Development Project:

Grow Your Own

Mull and Iona Community Trust:

Newsletter

Food Festival 2003

Oakley Fruit and Vegetable Co-Op:

Start-up Pack

Orkney Island Council Environmental Health Division:

Island Food Roadshow 2002

Skye and Lochalsh Horticultural Development Association:

Project Report 2001/02

Information Leaflet

Skye and Lochalsh Enterprise:

Skye and Lochalsh food and drink initiatives evaluation

Skye and Lochalsh food futures report

Western Isles Enterprise:

Grow Healthy Project

Scottish Islands Network

Email newsletter available from [www.scottishislands.org.uk](http://www.scottishislands.org.uk)

## **Also useful.....**

### **Health**

NHS Health Scotland:

Food Availability and Choice in Remote and Rural Areas 1995

Scottish Executive:

The Scottish Diet Action Plan is available online at [www.scotland.gov.uk/library/documents/diet-00.htm](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library/documents/diet-00.htm)

*Improving Health in Scotland: The Challenge* is available from the Stationery Office Bookshop. Tel: 0870 606 55 66. Fax: 0870 606 55 88. Quote ISBN 0-7559-0607-1 or online at [www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/health/ihis-00.asp](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/health/ihis-00.asp)

HealthyLiving Eating Identity Guidelines

### **Community planning**

For information about Community Planning eg *Guidelines to Integrating Social Inclusion Partnerships with Community Planning Partnerships*, contact:

Stephen Krzyzanowski, Policy Officer, Community Planning Scotland. Tel 0131-244 0420, or E-mail: [communityplanning@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:communityplanning@scotland.gsi.gov.uk) or Karen Jackson, Team Leader, Community Planning Branch. Tel 0131 244 7040 or see online at [www.communityplanning.org.uk](http://www.communityplanning.org.uk)

### **Support for community initiatives**

From the Co-operative Group:

- Community Retailing
- Community Food Discount Card
- Doing your Community the Power of Good
- Join our Partner Card
- Community Dividend
- Responsible Retailing Initiatives
- Co-operative Action - A Kick Start for Co-operation
- Co-operative Insurance - Community Grants

From the Food Standards Agency Scotland

- Starting up: your first steps to running a catering business
- For a full list of publications visit [www.food.gov.uk](http://www.food.gov.uk)

## **Acknowledgements**

The Scottish Community Diet Project would like to thank all the speakers and participants for contributing so fully to the Food and Health on Scottish Islands conference and to this report.

Scottish Community Diet Project  
c/o Scottish Consumer Council  
Royal Exchange House  
100 Queen Street, Glasgow G1 3DN  
Tel: 0141 226 5261  
Fax: 0141 221 0731

Report by Heather & Co. Tel: 0131 661 2814. E-mail:  
HeatherWalkerCo@aol.com



*Barra*  
*Bute*  
*Islay*  
*Mull and Iona*  
*Orkney*  
*Skye*  
*Small Isles*  
*Western Isles*

**Scottish Community Diet Project**

c/o Scottish Consumer Council  
Royal Exchange House, 100 Queen Street  
Glasgow, G1 3DN

tel: 0141 226 5261

fax: 0141 221 0731

e-mail: [scdp@scotconsumer.org.uk](mailto:scdp@scotconsumer.org.uk)

[www.dietproject.org.uk](http://www.dietproject.org.uk)



**healthy**living