1. What types of budget support does the sector need to grow its capabilities and build markets?

More support is needed for micro-businesses and small businesses at the grassroots level. We have tiny innovative food & drink micro-businesses in large numbers across south west Scotland. They are too small for established support. Membership of Scotland Food & Drink at £600 +VAT means that only well established businesses can engage with the national agency. Many of our new innovative food & drink businesses in SW Scotland could use easy to access specialist advice early in their development instead of after they have already become successful. By not engaging with the grassroots level we are missing an opportunity to unlock the full potential of many new businesses.

In SW Scotland there is some duplication of local and regional efforts. Targeting Innovation programme delivered through Scottish Enterprise is very similar to the ERDF Growth Advisory Programme (GAP) delivered by Dumfries & Galloway Council, however GAP is more accessible to businesses, both in terms of cost and geographic delivery. Therefore, Targeting Innovation is of zero relevance to any food and drink producer in D&G as a better and more accessible service is available locally. Perhaps we could use the funding more effectively without the duplication.

2. Is what is currently offered by the Scottish Government and Public bodies effective in terms of providing the support needed?

Distilling has received good support in other parts of Scotland- but it is worth noting that Bladnoch Distillery has received no Government funding (to my knowledge) and it would be a good move on the part of Scot Gov to reach out to the new owner who has invested heavily into the community as well as the distillery.

Food and drink are the largest economic sector in south west Scotland- our dairy, beef, lamb output is significant but the grants awarded don’t reflect that. Please look at the tiny percentage of FPMC grants and EMFF grants awarded to SW Scotland based businesses. There is an odd imbalance.

3. How can tax measures be used to help the Food and Drink sector deliver on food policy objectives?

Increasing in the VAT threshold would be very helpful. Rates relief for small businesses including micro-businesses. Some incentive for keeping food miles down and supporting local farmers and food producers- higher taxes for higher food miles.

4. What should be the over-riding objective(s) of support?

For Southwest Scotland- economic growth for our rural economy is crucial.

Protecting our EU farm and food producing workers is also crucial.
Food and drink - from farm to fork - are in need of strong and consistent support. Not only the large producers, the micro-businesses are tomorrows small businesses and the futures large businesses.

Health and well being are also important, but we should not harm our budding entrepreneurs in pursuit of health and well being - both are important we need to encourage a sensible, sustainable balance.

Emma Harper MSP
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