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

**Grassroots Support**

The industry is crying out for grassroots resources which are tangible and will make genuine meaningful change. I was Project Manager of the regional food network in Dumfries & Galloway, Savour the Flavours, from 2009 until its natural conclusion in the Autumn of 2013. It was recognised at a national level as being the leading regional food and drink organisation in Scotland. The reason it was so successful was because it was led by the industry, for the industry. It was holistic in its approach and represented the full spectrum of the industry, from producers to end users to consumers. Essentially Savour the Flavours was about empowering the industry, creating a smarter and more successful industry, strategically structuring activities to encourage collaboration and partnership working, committed to helping the region and its businesses to thrive.

The national programmes are a very poor fit with the needs of D&G businesses. Budgets need to be delivered on a regional basis, depending on the individual, and often unique, needs of the region by people who understand the sector within the region who can implement meaningful support to the many artisan producers, who are crying out for help, that we have across the region which would, undoubtedly, have a transformative impact on the food and drink sector across our region, if utilised in a meaningful way.

**Evidence of Success**

The reason that Savour the Flavours ceased was due to budget cutbacks, which led to the Council removing ongoing support for it despite independent evaluations demonstrating that it proved to be excellent value for money and effective - and most importantly the industry valued and trusted it. The 2013 project evaluation undertaken by SAC confirmed:

“The business survey responses highlight one key finding, that StF is even more respected and rated in 2013 than it was in 2011. In every comparable measure the project has out-performed the strong results from 2011.”

Key findings included:

- almost 83% of businesses noted that their business had directly benefited from its association with StF; this was greater than the 76% quoted in the 2011 survey
63% of the survey sample rated StF as ‘excellent’, this compares to 33% in the 2011 survey.

The total financial impact [to businesses responding to the survey] would be around £168,000 per annum (£100,000 in 2011)."}

Savour the Flavours delivered significant tangible achievements across a broad range of measures. Often it was small interventions and conversations that led to the most significant change for individual businesses, with the Savour the Flavours team joining the dots across the industry through a hands-on approach to business mentoring and industry development.

2. Is what is currently offered by the Scottish Government and Public bodies effective in terms of providing the support needed?
Absolutely not. Dumfries & Galloway is desperately in need of meaningful support. What is currently offered is not a good fit with the needs of the food and drink sector in Dumfries and Galloway. A successful model of industry support existed, was well regarded and indeed was held up as THE model for supporting food in rural Scotland, but without resourcing this support cannot be delivered.

We have very few large or manufacturing businesses within the region. Dumfries & Galloway is unique in that the bulk of our businesses are made up of micro and small artisan producers, many of whom are one man bands, or small family run units.

National public agencies who control the purse strings have a complete dis-connect with Dumfries and Galloway in terms of what support is required and most of the time the support offered does not fit with what these small businesses are needing. Therefore businesses feel that national agencies do not add any value to their business and waste their time when offering support that is irrelevant to them. The Industry here does not trust national programmes pushing ‘support’ at them, centrally resourced support will never have a meaningful impact here.

If the budget was split proportionately and Dumfries and Galloway was allocated its share which, in turn, was delivered by people who understood the food and drink sector in the region, then it would have a transformative impact on these businesses, if utilised in a meaningful way.

3. How can tax measures be used to help the Food and Drink sector deliver on food policy objectives?
No comment

4. What should be the over-riding objective(s) of support?
Economic growth is our main challenge and, right now, the food and drink sector is extremely fragile in the south of Scotland. During my time as Project Manager of
Savour the Flavours we created and delivered Flavour Fortnight, which proved that innovative and tailored support and initiatives could have a transformative impact on the sector both in terms of economic impact, growth and sustainability. Flavour Fortnight was a spin off project from Savour the Flavours, a dispersed artisan food festival with a focus on practical hands-on consumer facing events.

While on the surface it looked like a food festival, in reality Flavour Fortnight was a business development and diversification tool. It provided a framework and a mechanism for encouraging the industry to explore innovative and creative ways to add value to their tourism and food and drink offering.

With event development supported through business mentoring by the Project Team, this approach gave businesses an opportunity to explore collaborative or partnership working on event delivery which often led to the formation of long lasting collaboration and product and service innovations and developments. The high levels of industry participation meant that Flavour Fortnight events comprised fully half of the national Scottish Food & Drink Fortnight programme.

An independent evaluation of Flavour Fortnight by SAC highlighted that there was a direct financial impact to businesses as a result of (1) trading during the festival and (2) future trading opportunities. In 2012 the total this was estimated to be around £193,440. There were also additional indirect benefits associated with specific overnight trips to events, the value of which was estimated to be around £82,338. In total Flavour Fortnight 2012 helped generate in the region of £275,778, which when measured against the value of the public sector support (£20,000) represents a return of investment of £1:£14.

The long term impact of Flavour Fortnight was significant. The event was the trigger for a number of hobbies being turned into businesses while the business diversification tested by participation in Flavour Fortnight resulted in a number of businesses integrating events, experiences and pop-up activities into their core business model, thereby creating additional revenue streams and supporting their long term business stability.

The seeds we planted with Flavour Fortnight are still bearing fruit today. It should be noted that, particularly in rural areas, sustainable sector development takes time – there are no quick wins for economic development in parts of Scotland that experience structural barriers to business growth.

However, Flavour Fortnight proved that with the right support for businesses, well resourced by people who are experienced and knowledgable of the sector and the local economy, that transformative impact can be delivered for a fairly modest investment. We raised ambition, encouraged innovation, facilitated collaboration and made a difference to micro and small businesses right across the region both in terms of economic impact and growth, and, just as importantly, giving them confidence.
Grassroots resourcing is the only way to support meaningful sustainable growth in the south of Scotland

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