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Food and Drink Industry

30 November 2023

ACKNOWLEDGING SCOTLAND'S INVALUABLE FOOD AND DRINK SECTOR

Scotland's food and drink sector is worth £15 billion to our economy, supports thousands of jobs and businesses and is a success story at home and internationally. That is something worth celebrating this St Andrew's Day and I know that many people in Scotland and all around the world will be marking their own celebrations of our national day with some of our great food and drink produce. The value of Scotland's food and drink industry, and the significant contribution it makes to our national and local economies and to our communities cannot be overstated.

As we approach the end of another challenging year, I want to take this opportunity to extend my enduring gratitude to the food and drink sector. Food is a fundamental need for all of us, and so, I want to thank the industry, including our farmers, fishers, crofters, food manufacturers and producers who are at the heart of our communities, including our rural, coastal and island communities. You all play a vital role in keeping the sector operating and supplying our food each and every day.

There is no doubt that the sector has borne the brunt of an array of significant challenges in recent years. This includes those caused by Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian illegal invasion of Ukraine and the overarching threat of climate change. Brexit, for example, has created serious, long-term harms, including labour shortages with new barriers to trade, especially for Scottish food and drink exporters, while driving up inflation in food and supply chain costs. The sector has repeatedly had to respond and adapt as a result.

Despite these challenges, we cannot forget that the appetite for Scottish products abroad remains strong. This week I attended a trade event in Paris where some of our nation's finest products were on offer.

Stornoway black pudding, beef from Orkney, biscuits from Mull – and of course whisky from some of the most prestigious distilleries across the Highlands and Islands. What struck me was not only the use of quality ingredients by our producers but also the dedication, passion and care they put into their products.

It is this powerful combination that will ensure Scotland's place as a premier source of some of the world's finest food and drinks products.

Christmas is clearly one of the sector's busiest times and it is very important to me to give my heartfelt thanks to industry just now and to reaffirm that I do not underestimate the cumulative impacts that recent challenges have placed, and continue to place, on it.

In a debate in the Scottish Parliament, only this September, I acknowledged the value of the sector and welcomed the ten year plan published by Scotland Food and Drink to support it. The Scottish Government is investing £5 million to support the delivery of this plan and I hope that this will go some way to help the sector create much needed stability, sustainability, innovation and resilience, including in the face of ongoing challenges.

Lastly, it's your efforts that encourage people to buy our Scottish produce and your dedication that helps us to build a brighter future for our communities, including our vital rural and island communities. I want to express, again, my sincere thanks for your hard work and commitment and offer my very best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mairi Gougeon', with a stylized flourish at the end.

MAIRI GOUGEON