

Annex 1 – Local Food Workshop Report

Producer responses to survey

by Transition Exeter. January 2010



The future of food in Exeter and surrounding district: What do you want to see?

We need your views!

Transition Exeter is asking you, as a local grower/producer, for your views on this important subject. This is a simple survey with just ONE question (in 2 parts!). Survey findings will be presented at a workshop about local food strategy in January 2010. The audience (local policy makers) will then get the benefit of your views- freshly delivered. The workshop is designed to try and stimulate local action to increase the amount of locally produced & consumed food in Exeter & surrounding district. With this aim in mind, please answer the question below:

*What actions could **local** organisations / policy makers take, that would make your life easier and your business more viable?*

Many important and topical issues were raised by the growers and producers who responded to our survey. Topics are briefly summarised and followed by proposed areas for action or suggestions quoting directly from the producers.

Farmers Market

The Farmers Market (FM) is a high priority for many producers, who view it as an important marketing opportunity and essential sales outlet. Issues include the current location and frequency of the Exeter FM as well as the need to better promote and service the FM.

- I still believe we could find room in the Bedford Sq area and thus regain lost customers from Princesshay / Southernhay offices and increase footfall. With adequate trolleys and some flexibility from Highways on pedestrianisation we could surely overcome traffic problems. The current location is okayish but loading/ unloading is limited and sometimes harzardous, parking is horrendous!
- I wonder if they [ECC] have ever done a simple survey to calculate size of business attending, how much money they take and how many people they employ, all of which must be good for the local economy
- My best selling outlet is Exeter farmers market (held weekly) but I could do with a second one. I don't want to drive 30-40 miles to another farmers market when a city the size of Exeter should be able to support lots of local food producers
- Considering the surrounding district and taking Tiverton as an example, shoppers must be encouraged out of supermarkets and back to the 'High Street'. Free short stay parking and financial assistance for independent traders would help re-juvenate towns where charity shops dominate key premises, encouraging farm shops and delis thus promoting local food
- Get the FM back into the heart of the city!
- FM was a much more worthwhile proposition when at Bedford Square because Southernhay people (employees) shopped there
- Convenience is increasingly a key issue
- Another Market on a Friday in Exeter City Centre
- (Potential of) FMs etc to promote produce

Farmers Market cont...

- Better promotion of local (Exeter) FM. For example in Exeter the council who run the market, has had its advertising budget reduced. They are also not very resourceful in how and where they advertise. Crediton FM is run by volunteers who are also producers who have little time and resources to 'think outside the box'
- We should have access to another weekly Farmers' Market in the centre of Exeter. For some reason this is currently seen as politically undesirable
- Everyone living/working in Exeter knows about the problems of the current location of the market and ECC's apparent lack of support in terms of flexibility (historical and no doubt political too). Wonder if they have ever done a simple survey to calculate size of business attending, how much money they take and how many people they employ, all of which must be good for the local economy
- Exeter is the capital of a county famed for its local produce and yet it lacks a real showcase for this- other than one FM per week.

Local Procurement

Local procurement is desired by grower / producers and was raised as a common issue in both the short and long term. It requires a guaranteed fair price through contracts for growing and for supplying e.g. local organisations as well as both commitment and detailed planning.

- Guarantee a market at a 'Fair' price, i.e. at a price above the cost of production for a producer located in the Exeter area. To achieve this there needs to be a cultural and political shift. Firstly this would be manifested by the strategic partners and councils producing a 'local, sustainable Food plan
- Binding commitments from organisations (e.g. schools, hospitals, works canteen's, etc.) to purchase a clearly defined quantity of locally produced, sustainably produced food
- Outlets such as local authorities/ NHS trusts should be looked at as ideal partners to sell local produce into. These are organisations which already know their day to day requirements and being able to liaise and work out a demand and supply contract would be a good first step
- This needs to be planned on a weekly basis so that the suppliers and growers have 6 months to a years notice to plan crops accordingly
- This local procurement policy would follow on from a commitment to guaranteeing a fair price to local producers, this would be set out in the local food strategy (that would be developed now by the local authorities & partners)
- DCC has 3 year contracts that they don't review / change - this does not help businesses like his to supply e.g. Kenn School. Too much red tape not enough action
- In order for food producers to have confidence in investing large amounts of capital in planting permanent crops such as apples and pears or buying new machinery to grow vegetable crops they require a guarantee from the powers that be that they will be supported in what they are going to grow
- For new orchards to produce commercially viable crops can take 5 years so a commitment now is really not worth the paper it is written on (as the process) needs to over a 15 to 20 year period
- The land around the Exeter area is very good for growing most crops successfully. In order for food producers to have confidence in investing large amounts of capital in planting permanent crops such as apples and pears or buying new machinery to grow vegetable crops they require a guarantee from the powers that be that they will be supported in what they are going to grow

Business Support

Support for business start-up and business development were both raised as requirements in the short and long term with many suggestions for action including: skills development and training, expansion of new businesses, encouraging new entrants, major infrastructure projects and manufacture and export potential.

- Dedicated premises at low rents for start-up businesses in towns (e.g. local food centres for retail)
- Provision of marketing/economic support to encourage small local food businesses (under 5 employees) even 12 month periods of support would help ensure business success
- Increase opportunities to acquire accounting and marketing skills (including online)
- Establishment of a central purchasing/distribution hub for local sustainably produced food and drink (pricing would be overseen by a 'mediator'; would recognise existing networks of local producers)
- Support business start-ups during expansion phase (could agencies e.g. EHO, Business Link
- Trading Standards tailor their support to meet the needs of time constrained small business people?
- Recognise and build on the potential of many local food to develop into successful manufacturing businesses capable of growth, local employment, competition, profitability, regional and national profile as well as export potential
- Scrap the localised areas for grant support – i.e. Ottery St Mary...due to its proximity to Exeter and Sidmouth fails to attract funding
- Fine to start off producing 'at home' as a business start up but the hurdles seem to be linked with expansion: Cost of employing/training staff, Finding suitable premises and equipment, Limited number of local sales outlets, Cost of distribution (plus wholesalers discount on low margin product). Help from agencies such as EHO (Environmental Health), Business Link and Trading Standards – available but time constraints and ignorance means that I don't make enough of them
- Government agencies providing marketing/economic support to encourage small local food business to flourish (by small I mean 5 employees or less). Even if it was just for 12 months that would help
- Business support in terms of accounting skills, marketing course and web marketing but not during the day when we are working!
- Dedicated premises at low rents for start-up businesses in towns (not on industrial parks miles away) together with local food centres for retail. For example near M5 services so that tourist and locals alike can stop and shop with confidence about regional provenance or even right in the middle of town which has other tourist attractions like the cathedral
- Rent rebates on empty shops to allow fresh local food shops to try it out?
- Support in setting up business including infrastructure projects as well as business start up e.g. centralised storage facilities, oat mill, flour mills, etc.
- Support in setting up a central purchasing and distribution hub(s) for local, sustainably produced food and drink. The pricing would be overseen by a 'mediator' to ensure 'fair' pricing (in much the same way as Ofcom, Oftel, Ofgas, etc. oversee the utility services.) Recognise that there are already networks of local producers that work together
- As a beef producer I need an abattoir closer to where I farm (i.e. within 2 miles) ... to cooperate with other farmers and to share resources

Promotion of local food

A coordinated approach by the many relevant agencies was called for to encourage local food production and consumption with all of its associated benefits. Producers could advise on the promotion of local food and also, crucially, how to ensure the correct use of terms such as 'local', 'sustainably produced' and 'organic certification' in the supply and retailing of local food. The dominance of supermarkets was also raised.

- Consolidate the various food sector organisations into one body- there are too many all with strengths but also lacking in real teeth. We need one operation with a commercial heart and committed team and less of the cross over. The people are in place already – they just seem almost to working against each other!
- We could have a more concerted and co-ordinated effort by the many and various relevant agencies (Government, charitable and NGO) to encourage local food production and consumption with all the associated benefits. At the moment these efforts appear to be a wasteful mess consuming vast (to us) resources with little or no benefit to us as producers
- Have been disappointed by DCC's pledge to support local food but the lack of direct action, i.e. Devon Food Links was disbanded a few years ago. Also, limiting support to sponsoring food festivals which are very expensive anyway. True, DCC have offered web marketing etc but group sessions a bit wide of the mark or not applicable or impractical for producers to attend. And whilst there is plenty of government help/support for farmers wishing to diversify there is not much (if any) for local food businesses (especially urban based)
- There should be more communication between government, NGOs and small local businesses as the aims are often mutually compatible. We rarely if ever are consulted by the people spending our money in our name on projects that should benefit us but don't
- A clear distinction of the terms 'Local' and 'sustainably produced', e.g. Devon and 'Organic' certification. There is plenty of government help/support for farmers wishing to diversify but not much (if any) for local food business. Agreed there are some exceptions but usually for rural areas only or stipulating 'women only'
- A system to ensure the integrity of the use of such terms in the supply and retailing of local and sustainably produced". (At present the misuse of the term 'locally produced' undermines the authentic local producer.)
- Recognise that there are already networks of local producers that work together e.g. Rod and Ben's soup for which ingredients are sourced locally beyond Rod and Ben's veg.
- I'm not sure whether it would be at all feasible, but could supermarkets be 'forced' to house a proportion of local traders in a FM style layout? If you can't beat 'em, join 'em!

Skills and training

Recruitment is currently a significant issue: skills gaps are both a short and long term issue. New entrants to growing and producing local food have a steep learning curve ahead and need support; food safety and hygiene is an area where a minimum skills level should be more widely achieved. Suggestions include:

- Encourage and train new entrants in sustainable growing and farming with courses at all levels, mentoring schemes and training in practical skills (understand links from food production to consumption)
- Include education about food production, preparation and cooking in the school curriculum
- Direct finance to training and developing local talent to high level of technical proficiency, thus negating the need to bring in new blood from out of the area as the business grows
- Provide more free/low cost training courses on food hygiene for young people wanting to get into food businesses and also for those wanting to return to work after raising families at home for example

Skills and training cont...

- Means of encouraging and training new entrants in sustainable growing and farming. This could involve courses at all levels, mentoring schemes and training in practical skills
- Getting smaller farmers and growers more savvy as to the needs of production facilities in terms of food safety
- More free/low cost training courses on food hygiene for young people wanting to get into food businesses and also for those wanting to return to work after raising families at home for example
- Include food production and cooking in the school curriculum
- More education about food production and preparation and the links: Primary producer → processor → wholesaler → retailer → consumer
- Giving time off the school timetable at critical times of the farming calendar to help on farms e.g. fruit picking
- Recruitment of growers a major issue: skills gap. (Easier to find people to make soup (i.e. process food) than to grow veg)

Marketing and advertising

Marketing came up frequently with issues ranging from the need to increase customer awareness of local food, producers and food related events to specific suggestions regarding advertising standards:

- Trading Standards should define, advertise and enforce standards regarding the advertising of local food at all levels and points in the food chain
- A link on the local authority website to lists of local food producers and more events (would be beneficial)
- Role of FMs etc to promote produce
- More ways of marketing and increasing customer awareness would be beneficial such as possibly including a link on the local authority website to lists of local food producers & more events. FMs etc to promote produce. Linking local producers to customers would always be beneficial
- Perhaps more focus should be aimed at this sector. SWMAS (SW Manufacturing Advisory Service) could concentrate efforts with specific courses; Business link and SWFD could find some sector specific mentors with assistance in marketing plans food export opportunities. Finance directed to training and development of local talent to become more technically proficient negating the requirements to bring in new blood from out of area as the business grows
- Finance directed to training and development of local talent to become more technically proficient negating the requirements to bring in new blood from out of area as the business grows
- Local food outlets & events such as FM need more continuous promotion / advertising
- I (also) think producers should in some way offer their skills. Several local producers attending Exeter FM were given airtime on local radio. Why not television? Websites etc
- Marketing course and web marketing but not during the day when we are working!

Conservation, environmental protection and seasonality

These issues were raised hand in hand with the importance of education the public / consumers:

- Local producers have to show the public that by supporting them, the public is providing the Devon countryside with a way of sustaining itself- along with other conservation projects
- Be prepared to pay more for locally grown produce from small scale producers ... (without comparing it to) large scale producers and foreign imports (which) benefit from economies of scale if large and in some cases subsidies from regional governments if foreign
- Become aware of the seasonality of various fresh fruit and vegetables grown locally so they (consumers) can use and order them at the correct time
- Fresh produce not readily available locally (mainly because) supermarkets have developed relationships with a few large scale producers who are able to provide what they want when they want which in turn they provide to their consumers. The public then become unaware of seasonality
- The public then become unaware of seasonality and are happy not to question the ethics of flying in fresh Asparagus from Peru ... 'seasonality' was accepted in the past accepting as the way of life
- This change in buying patterns has meant that small sale local producers have completely changed what they grow or have ceased to trade. Multiple crop growing has ceased ... most small scale glasshouse growers just grow one type of crop rarely edible crops as the returns are so poor despite the fact they were more than competent at growing them
- Direct threats to farming businesses - BSE & British beef
- to develop a sustainable agriculture business
- A system to ensure the integrity of the use of such terms in the supply and retailing of local and sustainably produced. (At present the misuse of the term 'locally produced' undermines the authentic local producer.)

Other issues raised by respondents included:

the planning application process, red tape (need for less in food regulation), the importance of developing sustainable agricultural businesses, transport and access, and managing direct threats e.g. disease.

- Planning applications should be dealt with correctly and fairly - irrespective of whether applicant is a supermarket or a small local business. At the moment they most definitely are not! This one point is the one that has most crippled our business over the last few years. This one point is the one that has most crippled our business over the last few years. Because of this one point we now employ less than half the people we used to.
- Have more people involved in food production and less in food regulation. Regulation gets in the way of relationship between primary producer and consumer
- Make parking (short stay especially)/ general access for public easier in towns
- Getting smaller farmers and growers more savvy as to the needs of production facilities in terms of food safety and consistent production of quality local produce

- Many artisan producers have considerable prospects to be a real tour de force- These are MANUFACTURING companies buying local products and producing locally for the local economy... added benefit of export opportunities – these businesses offer great employment and financial benefits ... and need support to help them grow and be fit to compete on a regional and national stage. Need for efficient manufacturing & for high levels of profit to be generated
- Reduce red tape & bureaucracy i.e. have more people involved in food production and less in food regulation. Regulation gets in the way of relationship between primary producer and consumer
- To produce excellent quality red Devon beef for our consumers and to ensure our animal welfare standards are always high

Acknowledgements

12 producers responded including growers (4), grower/horticulturalist (1) Artisan baker (1), Pies/pasties manufacturer (1), Beekeeper/ Honey (1), Cheese maker (1), Beef (2), Farmer (1).

Transition Exeter is very grateful to all the growers and producers who took part in the survey and for taking the time to provide such considered and informed responses.

Our thanks also go to Sarah Collier who conducted the survey and was the 'voice' of producers at the Local Food Workshop event on 20th January, where she presented the findings.

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