

Food for Life Catering Mark Case Study: Highland Council School Meals Catering Service

Target audience and purpose

This case study provides an informative example to caterers in the public or private sector looking to make the food on their menu better for health, the environment, animal welfare and the local economy. More specifically it is useful for those interested in gaining the Soil Association's Food for Life Catering Mark (see box below).

BRONZE:

- No undesirable additives or hydrogenated fats
- 75% of dishes freshly prepared
- Meat is farm assured
- Eggs from cage free hens
- Menu is seasonal
- Training of catering staff
- No GM ingredients

SILVER - in addition to the Bronze criteria:

- Locally sourced items on the menu
- Certified organic **OR** Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) items on the menu
- Poultry, eggs and pork is Freedom Food assured **OR** 10% of ingredients certified organic or MSC
- No fish from Marine Conservation Society 'Fish to Avoid' list
- Information on display about provenance of foods
- At least one product is Fair Trade

GOLD - in addition to the Bronze and Silver criteria:

- 30% of ingredients certified organic **OR** MSC
- 50% of ingredients are locally sourced
- Meat, dairy products and eggs are certified organic
- Steps taken to increase up-take of non-meat dishes to promote a more sustainable diet

Context

In 2002 the Scottish Executive launched *Hungry for Success* which was designed to raise nutritional standards of school meals and encourage nutrition education in the classroomⁱ. This led to the passing of the *Schools (Health*

Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007 which sets nutritional standards and is now enforced in primary and secondary schools throughout Scotland.

The development of a food and drink policy for Scotlandⁱⁱ together with the introduction of *Curriculum for Excellence*ⁱⁱⁱ has extended the scope of food education in schools from an appreciation of nutrition and healthy choices, to an understanding of the whole food chain and the links between food, health, the environment and the economy. Sustainable food procurement in the public sector is a key aim of the food and drink policy, as evidenced by the Government paper *Catering for Change: Buying food sustainably in the public sector*^{iv}.

The Soil Association's Food for Life programme of work was launched in 2003 to improve the quality of school meals by introducing targets for food sourcing and food education. In Scotland the Food for Life programme of work is currently funded by the Scottish Government and includes catering services in the public and private sectors. The Food for Life Catering Mark has been developed to support caterers to achieve the Food for Life core targets of 75% fresh, 50% local and 30% organic.

Case study background

Highland Council provides school meals to 173 primary schools and 29 secondary schools across Scotland's largest region, including some of the country's most remote schools. This makes it the largest in-house catering service in Scotland.

Most of the schools in the region have fully functioning kitchens and a long history of local sourcing and fresh food preparation. Around 40 schools have meals brought in from neighbouring school kitchens. Many schools

now have food-growing gardens and deliver food education involving school cooks.

Highland Council has been one of the key catering services involved in awareness-raising and development of Food for Life in Scotland. The Council launched Food for Life in the Council chamber in Inverness in 2005, organised meetings to encourage local producers to tender for procurement contracts, and held a conference to promote local food in 2008.

The Bronze Food for Life Catering Mark was awarded to Highland Council in 2009 for the 9,000 meals provided per day to its 173 primary schools. Highland Council catering service is now working towards achieving the Silver Food for Life Catering Mark for all its school meals in both primary and secondary schools.

The menu

The primary school menu changes twice a year in order to maintain some seasonality. The four-week menu cycle offers a choice of two or three main meals per day, including a vegetarian option. Each meal includes a side vegetable, salad selection and pudding. Fresh fruit, yoghurt and bread are available daily.

The suppliers

Highland Council has long supported local Highland producers. The Council is able to use local producers by collaboration and negotiations with suppliers to distribute produce on behalf of local suppliers and producers. For example, the Highlands based fruit and vegetable supplier has been asked to deliver organic carrots from a contracted local producer.



Organic carrots from the local grower TIO

The Council also has an agreement with Brakes (a nationally contracted foodstuffs supplier) to deliver free-range eggs from a contracted local producer.



Free range eggs from the local producer Allarburn

Challenges

Delivery of perishable ingredients The smaller more remote schools tend to have limited delivery frequencies, in most cases only once per week. Many of these schools have limited storage facilities foodstuffs. This poses a challenge when increasing and expanding the use of fresh ingredients as part of the Food for Life Catering Mark criteria.

Lack of MSC certified fresh fish In efforts to achieve the Silver Food for Life Catering Mark, meetings have taken place with Mey Selections to supply Highland Council with fresh MSC-certified fish from fisheries in Scrabster. In the meantime Brakes is able to supply frozen MSC certified fish products.

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Poor supply of Freedom Food poultry from Scotland In order to achieve the Silver Food for Life Catering Mark, the catering service must find a supply of Freedom Food poultry. The procurement officer for the Highland Council catering service attended a Food for Life Scotland event on establishing a Scottish-sourced Freedom Food poultry supply. Brakes currently supply the Council with fresh farm assured chicken which meets the Bronze Food for Life Catering Mark criteria.

Difficulty sourcing farm assured cooked meat Highland Council catering service has found it difficult to source farm assured cooked meat products in the pack size and cuts required. The farm assured cooked meat products that are available are often unaffordable. Highland Council has been unable to source farm assured bacon, and so has taken it off the primary school menu. Farm assured ham has been sourced, but at a much greater cost. The catering service has reduced the number of times ham appears on the menu in order to be able to afford the higher animal welfare product.

Central procurement Highland Council has signed up to Scotland Excel for centralised procurement of dry and frozen foods. However this arrangement does allow the opportunity to use the supplier for distribution of local produce.

No response from local suppliers or producers when going out to tender Highland Council has found that when they put contracts out for tender they gain limited response from local suppliers or producers. For example no local producers came forward to tender for milk, bakery products or fish. The authority then had to seek and make alternative arrangements.

Replication in other Local Authority schools catering services

Challenges – why may it be difficult to replicate what Highland Council has done in other local authorities?

Procurement policy Although the catering service is being forced to make savings in its budget it is committed to maintaining the purchase of high quality, local, seasonal and organic produce. This commitment is reflected

in the development of a draft Highland Council Sustainability Food Procurement Policy. The principles of the policy, which is the first of its kind, will guide the details of future contract specifications if agreed and approved by the Council.

Shared objectives While working in accordance with procurement and sustainability guidance and policy the Highland Council Executive and Members support and encourage community engagement, employment and food production. The Education Culture and Sport Catering Service are a passionate team in relation to the provenance of food supplies, and in consideration of animal welfare and environmental matters. By sharing the same objectives this enables the Council to work together to achieve its aims in accordance with Food for Life principles.

Strengths - what makes the Highland Council model replicable in other local authorities?

Keeping costs down The free range, locally produced eggs now procured by Highland Council have proven to be more competitive than the standard eggs available through Scotland Excel. This shows that contrary to common perceptions, it does not always cost more to source higher quality, locally produced food.

References

ⁱThe Scottish Government (2002) *Hungry for Success: A Whole School Approach to School Meals in Scotland*. The Scottish Government. Available at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/47032/023961.pdf>

ⁱⁱ The Scottish Government (2009) *Recipe for Success – Scotland's National Food and Drink Policy*. The Scottish Government. Available at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/277346/0083283.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ The Scottish Executive (2004) *A Curriculum for Excellence – The Curriculum Review Group*. The Scottish Executive. Available at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/26800/0023690.pdf>

^{iv}<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/337607/0110844.pdf>