

Organic Future

growing the organic market and a food movement in Northern Ireland



and the **NORTHERN IRELAND REGIONAL FOOD PROGRAMME**



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Organic Future

was prepared for the Soil Association by John Woods
with the assistance of Christopher Stopes.

**John Woods | 3 Bangor Road | Holywood | Co Down BT18 0NT
T 028 9042 6513 | M 07712 843 213 | email: john@ballykeel.plus.com**

The Soil Association

The Soil Association is a membership charity campaigning for planet-friendly food and farming. We believe in the importance of the connection between soil, food, the health of people and the health of the planet. You can find out more about our policy, campaigns and programmes at www.soilassociation.org

Soil Association

South Plaza | Marlborough Street | Bristol BS1 3NX
T 0117 314 5000 | F 0117 314 5001
www.soilassociation.org

Soil Association Scotland

Tower Mains | 18c Liberton Brae | Edinburgh EH16 6AE
T 0131 666 2474 | F 0131 666 1684
www.soilassociationscotland.org

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Foreword

The emergence of organic agriculture as an important part of the culture and economy of food has been due in large part to the pioneering work of the Soil Association. While production and consumption have both blossomed in the United Kingdom as a whole, Northern Ireland's experience has been less positive with less than 1% of the land area in organic production compared with 4% for the UK.

That said, there are some great success stories on which to build a vibrant and thriving organic movement in Northern Ireland. Our vision is to build a food movement here with organic as the benchmark standard.

The idea to hold a series of stakeholder consultations to find out what organic farmers, growers, retailers and consumers would like the Soil Association to do specifically in Northern Ireland was given the opportunity to proceed as a result of a successful application to the Northern Ireland Regional Food Programme. Matching funding was generously received from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and individual and group stakeholders. The consultations included three group events in different parts of Northern Ireland and were attended by a wide range of interested parties. There were also eight consultations of key organisations and individuals to add their views and experience to help formulate our ambitious proposals.

The result of all this work is the contents of this document. I do believe the proposals are a true reflection of the consultations and are realistic in terms of our organisation's ability to deliver. This has been a very rewarding experience made possible by the effort and generosity of many. I hope it heralds a new chapter in Northern Ireland promoting the advantages and benefits of organic farming in supplying quality food sustainably, protecting farming and rural livelihoods, preserving our natural environment and helping address the enormous challenges of resource depletion and climate change.

I would like to thank the very many busy people who gave of their time willingly to help organise and attend the many events. I would also like to thank the many who gave of their money to support this project especially in these uncertain economic times. A special thanks needs to go to John Woods our consultant and author supported by Christopher Stopes, Victoria Izat and The Soil Association team in Bristol. Their understanding of the many issues discussed and has been creatively woven into these two exciting projects. Not least of course thanks need to go to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation as our principal funders.

I look forward to the next stage.

John McCormick
Soil Association Council Member for Northern Ireland

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Introduction

How can we grow the market for organic produce in Northern Ireland and how can we build a thriving low carbon, sustainable food and farming movement in Northern Ireland? These are the questions the Soil Association has been asking organic farmers, growers, processors, retailers, consumers and other stakeholders.

The Soil Association believes that the key to growing this movement and the market lies in:

- inspiring and educating the public about the health, social and environmental benefits of organic and local food;
- developing new relationships between producers and consumers that help create vibrant local food communities and a new food culture; and
- working with producers, processors and retailers to develop public and institutional markets for their produce in Northern Ireland and beyond.

Although the Soil Association has been licensing producers in Northern Ireland for many years the practical support available to licensees in Northern Ireland has not been as great as that across the Irish Sea. Nor has it been active here in its charitable aim of campaigning for planet-friendly food and farming, for the health of people and the health of the planet.

The big question is where to start - what kind of work do people in Northern Ireland think the Soil Association should prioritise? To answer this question it was decided to conduct a research and consultation project which took place during February 2010.

This document reports on the findings of the consultation and sets out two fully developed project proposals for implementation. The projects draw directly on the views gathered in the consultation and build on the Soil Association's many years of experience elsewhere. The authors and the Soil Association believe these projects offer a viable way forward for growing the organic market and a food movement in Northern Ireland.

Part I

Consultation Findings

1. Methodology

The consultation comprised three meetings involving a total of 60 producers and consumers in roughly equal numbers; a questionnaire survey of participants; and interviews with key individuals in eight stakeholder organisations.

Invitations to participate in one of two farm based meetings were issued to all Soil Association licensees and members in Northern Ireland, and to other organic certification organisations with a request to pass on the invitation to their members.

A meeting of organic consumers and people active at community level was held in Belfast, invitations having been issued to members of a group that meet regularly to eat organic food.

Participants were sent a copy of a briefing, 'Inspiring Ideas' (see appendix), that described the purpose of the consultation and a number of projects that had been developed in England, Scotland and Wales together with some suggestions from the NI Organic Action Plan Group. Meetings were independently facilitated and presentations were made by Soil Association staff at both farm based events. A particularly positive aspect of the farm meetings was that they included both producers and consumers in the same discussion.

The participants in all three meetings were asked to complete a survey that asked them to list their preferences for the projects described in 'Inspiring Ideas'. The results were aggregated to give an indication of support for different projects.

A cross section of stakeholder organisations was selected for interview. The list could easily be expanded well beyond those selected but time was restricted. Each interviewee received a copy of 'Inspiring Ideas' in advance and interviews were semi-structured. In addition to discussing the key questions in the consultation, potential future partnerships were explored. Engagement in all cases was at a senior or expert level.

Taken together, the three elements of the consultation were designed to determine what two projects the Soil Association should develop into full proposals.

2. Summary findings

Headlines from consultation meetings

- ❖ **Leadership and Coordination:** form an Organic Lead Group, an Organic Support Network and a Soil Association Committee.

- ❖ **Supply chain:** build a web/network of physical links between producer and consumer.
- ❖ **Marketing:** create an NI organic identity; produce an online consumer directory; hold organic food festivals and create organic awards; link into the Organic UK initiative
- ❖ **Lobbying and communications:** engage with DARD, develop a communications strategy and function.
- ❖ **Social:** Food for Life project for schools; strengthen community through 'grow your own'; address social exclusion and inequality.

Headlines from the survey

- ❖ There is a strong consensus amongst producers and consumers for prioritising Food for Life and CSA/OBGs.
- ❖ Grow Your Own initiatives (community gardens, allotments, land-share) scored well but there is little consensus.
- ❖ Lobbying, Food Festivals and Awards, and a Directory for Consumers all scored well and enjoyed consensus support.

Headlines from stakeholder interviews

- ❖ **Strategy:** produce a strategy for sustainable agriculture in Northern Ireland.
- ❖ **Expand Organic Production:** focus on small farmers in LFAs; expand horticulture sector; training.
- ❖ **Health:** address physical health; mental health; health inequalities
- ❖ **Supply Chain:** build physical links between producer and consumer.
- ❖ **Culture:** change the food culture of Northern Ireland – the expanding interest in 'Grow Your Own' initiatives is an indicator of interest in change.
- ❖ **Food for Life:** healthy eating in schools appears to be progressing well in NI but there is a need for resources and help in adopting a 'whole school approach'.
- ❖ **Lobbying:** engage with a range of relevant Government departments.

3. Consultation Meetings

A total of 60 people (in addition to Soil Association staff), about half of whom were organic producers and half consumers and community activists, attended 3 meetings during February 2010.

MEETING 1: 'SMALL DINNER', BELFAST, 8 FEBRUARY 2010, 7PM TO 10.15 PM

This meeting was held in a private house amongst a group of 16 people brought together by the 7th Generation Project. They are committed consumers of organic produce who meet regularly to share an organic meal. Many are also active at community level on a range of social and environmental issues.

John McCormick, Soil Association Council Member, introduced the meeting with some background to the Soil Association, the importance of organic agriculture and the state of the organic sector in Northern Ireland. John Woods, the facilitator, then introduced the 'Inspiring Ideas' briefing that

participants had received in advance and been asked to read. After some initial questions and observations, participants were asked to focus in on what they thought are the most important things the Soil Association should work on in Northern Ireland in order to grow the organic market and build a food movement.

Five main themes emerged from the discussion:

Education and schools: There was considerable interest in the work of the Food for Life Partnership in England and a strong feeling that a similar programme is needed here. Alice Waters' edible schoolyard project in the US was quoted and the role of food in enabling parents and children to do things together. It was felt there were opportunities in the revised national curriculum and the extended schools programme. Schools at all levels should be engaged. Healthy eating can also help strengthen relationships in the family home and there should be better integration between formal and informal education, between the Department of Education and the Youth Service.

Food accessibility and food inequality: A number of participants had felt it was important to make organic food accessible to people suffering from social exclusion. Ideas included drop-off points for box-schemes in community centres or a mobile shop for 'food desert' areas; public transport access to farmers' markets; grassroots cookery initiatives such as the City Mission is doing; a box scheme designed for single people, especially the elderly. It needs to be affordable.

Marketing: It was felt that there is a disconnect between producer and consumer and a more direct relationship needs to be built. A marketing campaign is needed to create the desire for organic food. It should tap into people's values – organic food is good for you and good for the planet. It is difficult for people to know where to buy organic produce – information on the web would help as well as using social networking sites. Overcoming perceptions of expense is important – set up buying groups; a billboard campaign is a relatively inexpensive means of promotion; an organic cook-off at St George's market. A significant issue is the lack of trust in organic produce – consumers are confused and suspicious of 'green-washing'.

Grow your own: A number of participants felt that allotments, community gardens and land-share are important. Partnerships could be built with community centres to help people to grow their own. Growing food increases people's understanding of the issues.

Politics was also raised as an issue. There were differing views on whether it was important to lobby government or simply to get on with developing the organic market through all channels on the basis that government will follow where the people lead. Government has an important role to play but it was recognised that it was unlikely that it would take a lead.

Survey results

15 people completed the survey (see section 4 below). Aggregating the scores, Grow Your Own initiatives (Community Gardens, Allotment, Land-Share) was a strong first preference (with most of the support for Community Gardens). Food for Life was a strong second and Retail Directory came third.

MEETING 2: ROY LITTLE LTD, 16 FEBRUARY 2010, 3PM-4.30PM

The meeting was attended by 23 people, one third of whom were producers and retailers and two thirds of whom were consumers and community groups. The meeting was preceded by a tour of Roy Lyttle's fields where we saw some of his 30 organic acres (he farms 130 acres altogether) and discussed a number of issues including weed suppression and rotation.

After a welcome and introduction from John McCormick, John Woods, the facilitator, explained the consultation process, the place of this meeting within it, how the results would be recorded and disseminated, and the format of the meeting.

Ben Raskin, the Soil Association's Learning Manager and Horticultural Advisor gave a presentation that included a history of the Soil Association and an explanation of its work. He then illustrated some of the examples in the 'Inspiring Ideas' briefing that participants had received in advance and been asked to read, with his own experience. He described how future work in Northern Ireland could usefully be categorised as a) traditional/existing organic market (short term), b) new routes to market (medium term), and c) developing the organic market (medium to long term).

After questions and some discussion the meeting broke up into two workshops which each considered three questions:

1. What problems and opportunities organic farmers and growers currently face and what the Soil Association should do to help in the short, medium and long terms.
2. What problems and opportunities organic consumers currently face and what the Soil Association should do to help in the short, medium and long terms.
3. If the Soil Association could only do two things in Northern Ireland, what would they be?

Workshop 1 – key points:

- There is some consumer confusion around the organic brand; mixed messages and false claims in the marketing; lack of availability; and lack of consistency.
- Education and a Food for Life initiative in NI are important. One idea is to have a 'bandwagon' promoting organic and local food that tours schools and shopping centres.
- There needs to be more cooperation between organic producers in order to reach consumers. Some form of shared delivery service could help shorten the supply chain.
- DARD needs to be persuaded to take the organic sector seriously. We should engage the Minister directly on the issue.
- An Organic Lead Group is needed to represent NI organic producers. Could this be facilitated by the Soil Association?

The projects that the Soil Association should prioritise are:

1. Education – Food for Life
2. Lobbying – persuade DARD to take organic seriously
3. Facilitate an Organic Lead Group

Workshop 2 – key points:

- Organic food is perceived as being expensive although that often is not the case.
- People are not sure what to trust and are often confused by labelling and claims.
- It is difficult for many producers to find a route to market that works. Producers are often small and scattered across NI and likewise consumers are relatively thinly spread. There needs to be a 'bit in the middle' that connects the two but does not take all the profit out of the system.
- Producers can be isolated and bad publicity doesn't help.
- Opportunity – people want organic, local and seasonal and are keen to know more about how food is produced and to know the producers.
- Gardening in some schools is building interest.
- It is difficult for consumers to know where to find organic. Supermarkets have cut the number of lines they carry. The independent retail sector should be an opportunity.
- Community based, bottom-up, models can link consumers to producers e.g. community supported agriculture in Castlewellan.
- Food for Life is a great opportunity and should go beyond schools to care homes, hospitals and support for families via Homestart, for example.

The projects that the Soil Association should prioritise are:

1. Consumer education, information and marketing
2. Food for Life
3. Community supported agriculture and 'the bit in the middle'

Survey results

19 people completed the survey (see section 4 below). Community Supported Agriculture and Organic Buying Groups were a strong first preference. Grow Your Own initiatives and Food for Life came second and third but with not much between them.

MEETING 3: CULMORE FARM, KILREA, 20 FEBRUARY 2010, 10.30 AM TO 4.30PM

This meeting was attended by 21 people of whom 80% were producers and 20% were consumers. After a farm walk hosted by David Laughlin, the meeting moved to Arbutus restaurant in Kilrea.

After a welcome and introduction from John McCormick, John Woods, the facilitator, explained the consultation process, the place of this meeting within it, how the results would be recorded and disseminated, and the format of the meeting.

Phil Stocker, the Soil Association's Director of Farmer and Grower relations gave a presentation that included his reflections on the state of the organic sector in Northern Ireland and a history of the Soil Association and an explanation of its work. He then illustrated some of the examples in the 'Inspiring Ideas' briefing that participants had received in advance and been asked to read, with his own experience. He described how future work in Northern Ireland could usefully be categorised as a) traditional/existing organic market (short term), b) new routes to market (medium term), and c)

developing the organic market (medium to long term). Phil also described the 'Organic UK' advertising initiative being led by the Organic Trade Board.

The ensuing discussion focussed on the lack of identity and coherent marketing strategy for Northern Ireland Organic Produce. Participants were enthusiastic about the opportunity this meeting gave them to develop ideas and actions together. There was a strong consensus that a strategy to implement a number of near-market activities is needed.

The meeting broke up into two workshops which each considered three questions:

1. What problems and opportunities organic farmers and growers currently face and what the Soil Association should do to help in the short, medium and long terms.
2. What problems and opportunities organic consumers currently face and what the Soil Association should do to help in the short, medium and long terms.
3. If the Soil Association could only do two things in Northern Ireland, what would they be?

Workshop 1 – key points

- Northern Ireland organic produce lacks an identity.
- Our aim should be “to build NI demand for NI produced organic food”. (Production and supply chain needs will emerge but should be dealt with at a later date.)
- We should contribute to/expand Organic UK EU bid.
- Create an identity of NI organic products
- Promote organic sales in NI
 - Make sure NI is represented in Organic UK (lobby OTB and SA)
 - Paid capacity to do media/publicity work
 - Develop clear organic messages
 - Coordinate organic presence at 'Good Food is in Our Nature' stand at Balmoral
 - Organic festival in Belfast
 - Create Soil Association Committee in NI to steer, guide and develop a strong NI identity – must be inclusive: producers and public.

Workshop 2 – key points

- Schools focussed initiatives are the most important: Food for Life. Extend this to hospital food.
- Communications strategy:
 - Clear message to Govt on environmental benefits
 - Organic good for the climate
 - Evolve and refresh messages
- CSA - needs structures to make it happen
- Organic Network – on line and real life (start with those involved in this consultation). Greenmount has an important role to play

The meeting concluded with a plenary discussion which identified the following priority issues:

- Work with Organic UK
- Develop alternative routes to market:
 - Farmers markets

- Box schemes
- Community supported agriculture
- Organic buying groups
- Food for Life
 - Catering mark
 - School-yard Farmer's Markets
 - Demonstration Farms
- Develop and resource a communications strategy to raise awareness of organic food.

Survey results

20 people completed the survey (see section 4 below). CSA/Organic Buying Groups came first. More or less tying for second place were Farm Visits, Lobbying and Festivals/Awards.

4. Survey

52 people (27 producers and 25 consumers) who attended the three consultation meetings completed a survey at the end of the meeting. They were given a list of the 17 projects covered in 'Inspiring Ideas' and asked to list their five priority projects in order of preference. There was also a space to add any additional proposals.

The strength of the survey is that it reflects individuals' views after they had been provided with significant background information and had engaged in considerable discussion. Its main weakness is that although it aggregates individual views on the basis of applying scores to preferences and therefore represents a technical consensus, one should be wary about inferring that the results therefore necessarily represent a genuine consensus.

Participants were asked to identify themselves as producers or consumers. In this fairly crude categorisation 'producers' are farmers and commercial growers while 'consumers' includes community activists and growers as well as ordinary consumers.

The main results are:

1. Food for Life is 1st overall (1st for consumers and 2nd for producers)
2. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is 2nd overall (3rd for both consumers and producers)
3. Community Gardens are 3rd overall (2nd for consumers and 10th for producers)
4. Lobbying is 4th equal overall (4th for producers and 7th for consumers)
5. Organic Buying Groups (OBG) are 4th equal overall (4th for consumers and 6th for producers)
6. Retail Directory is 6th overall (5th for both producers and consumers)
7. Farm visits were 7th overall (1st for producers and 15th for consumers)

Some of the categories were very similar and in discussion were often treated as a group. If the following are amalgamated:

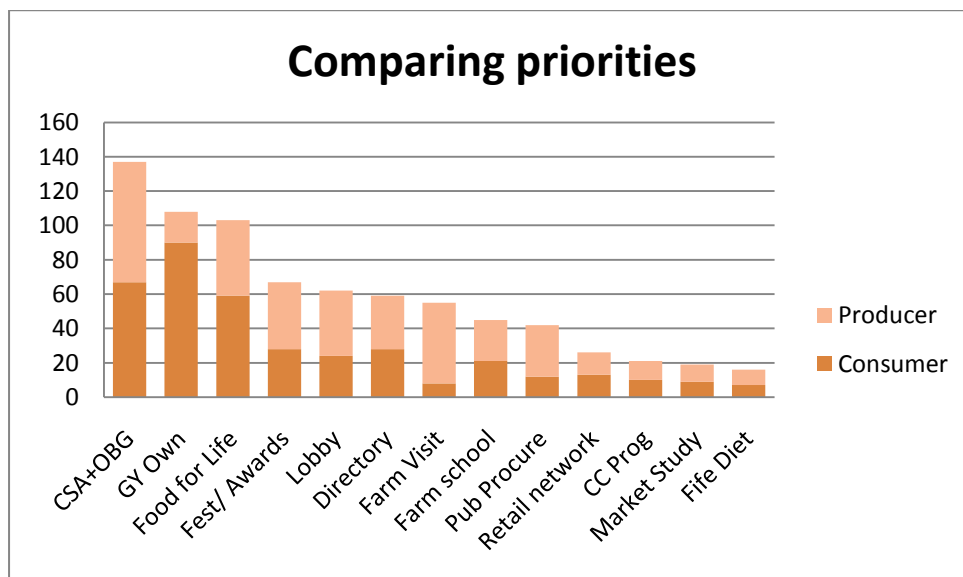
- CSA and OBG;

- community gardens, allotments and land-share into ‘grow your own’; and
- food festivals with food awards,

the following results emerge:

1. CSA/OBG is 1st overall (1st for producers and 2nd for consumers)
2. Grow Your Own is 2nd overall (1st for consumers and 9th for producers)
3. Food for Life is 3rd overall (3rd for both consumers and producers)
The above are clear ‘winners’ in terms of points, then
4. Festivals and Awards are 4th overall (4th for both consumers and producers)
5. Lobbying is 5th overall (5th for both consumers and producers)
6. Retail Directory is 6th overall (6th for both consumers and producers)
7. Farm visits are 7th overall (2nd for producers and 11th for consumers)

The chart below shows the overall results with the proportions of producer and consumer support.



There is clear consensual support for Community Supported Agriculture and Organic Buying Groups, suggesting that both producers and consumers are inspired by the idea of building closer relationships. Although ‘Grow your own’ is second, there is very little consensus. Not surprisingly commercial organic producers are not particularly interested. It is worth noting the strength of support from consumers, however. Food for Life is third with strong consensual support. Food Festivals and Awards, Lobbying and a Directory for Consumers all scored well and enjoyed consensus support. Further down the priorities, it is worth noting the disparate levels of support for farm visits – farmers seem keen on the idea but consumers look like they won’t turn up!

Participants in the survey were given the opportunity of adding their own ideas and the following were suggested:

- A network of producers, distributors and consumers
- Create an NI organic identity
- A marketing campaign appealing to different values.

5. Individual stakeholders

Interviews were conducted with eight stakeholder organisations and individuals. These were

- Sue Christie, Northern Ireland Environment Link
- Sinead Furey, Education and Training Inspectorate, DENI
- Alan Hamilton, Central Procurement Directorate, DFP
- Rex Humphrey, United Irish Organics
- Arthur Mitchell and Martin McDonald, Rural Development Council
- Nick Price, NE Ireland Slow Food Convivium
- Diane Ruddock, National Trust
- Jane Wilde and Tracey O'Neill, Institute of Public Health

Interviewees were sent the 'Inspiring Ideas' briefing in advance but not all were able to read it.

Interviews were based on the questions "How can we build a thriving low carbon, sustainable food and farming movement in Northern Ireland?" and "What should the Soil Association prioritise in Northern Ireland?". The report below gives a flavour of the key issues to emerge – the Soil Association has a full record of the interviews and the many valuable insights provided.

A number of common themes emerged from the interviews:

Organic Farming: A key problem identified was the lack of supply of organic produce. Overall, there is not enough NI organic production to meet NI demand and where the supply does exist it is often difficult to access. The need for a strategic overview for the expansion of the organic sector came through quite strongly. This should be in the context of a vision of a sustainable future for Northern Ireland agriculture as a whole. There needs to be a particular focus on small farmers in less favoured areas and on horticulture which is very underdeveloped and currently incapable of meeting NI demand. A demonstration and training programme in organic horticultural production for farmers and new entrants was suggested, perhaps using National Trust or DARD land. An interviewee from a public health background was specifically interested in increasing local production and developing the market for fruit and berries.

There are also signs of a change in attitude amongst some larger farmers who are attracted by the financial advantages of farming without increasingly expensive fertilisers. GM crops were described by one interviewee as a threat to the image of NI food – we are missing an opportunity to capitalise on our GM-free status.

Marketing: The theme of connecting consumers more directly to producers was a strong one. Farmers' markets were seen as an important route to market but there is also a need to establish physical supply lines that enable smaller producers to reach consumers. This could be a delivery system but it would have to be done in a way that did not destroy profitability. Many restaurants want to serve local organic produce but do not have time to tour Northern Ireland collecting it, while for producers it is generally not profitable to deliver over a large area. If there is to be an expansion in horticulture, access to markets will be critical in persuading farmers to change to organic.

Making information available to consumers is vital. Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) produced a booklet detailing sources of sustainable food but regularly updated information online is also necessary.

There is an emerging interest in organic food, healthy eating and 'grow your own'. One interviewee felt that more progress would be made by focussing on local produce rather than just organic. People want to re-establish a connection with where their food comes from.

Public procurement is an area with great potential but would require careful scoping and political leadership. One interviewee was keen that Northern Ireland be fully involved with the Organic UK initiative and thought it could be tailored to meet our needs.

Schools: There was broad support for a Food for Life initiative in schools. This would build on work being done on an *ad hoc* basis by a number of schools. It would also build on progress made on healthy eating in Northern Ireland schools in recent years. It was argued that nutritional standards in schools are now very much improved – a recent report¹ shows that “A majority of schools are making ‘good’, or ‘very good’, progress in the implementation of the *School Food: Top Marks* programme and the general approaches to promoting healthy eating in schools. A minority are making outstanding progress.” The Soil Association should be careful not to assume that the school food situation here is as it was in England three years ago. That said, many schools struggle with adopting a ‘whole school’ approach to health eating and there could be an important role to play in providing resources, initiatives, links and partnerships.

Health: Inequality is a particular issue in Northern Ireland and health inequalities are particularly marked. A way of connecting with this issue for the Soil Association is via the recommendations of the Marmot report for the WHO (ref). Work on healthy eating should tackle obesity and other diet related chronic diseases and should also be explicitly linked to tackling health inequality. Access to affordable good quality local and fresh fruit and vegetables is limited for many people suffering from social exclusion.

The procurement power of the NHS is vast. There is a need to ensure healthy food, not just for hospital patients, but for all those who eat food provided by the NHS whether as user or member of staff. The Soil Association needs to drive a major cultural change in attitudes to food in Northern Ireland.

A health evaluation of Food for Life in England would be important as evidence for work here and the importance of growing and cooking food to mental health issues should also be remembered.

Grow Your Own: There was a significant strand of opinion that the public imagination is being captured by ‘grow your own’ initiatives such as community gardens and allotments. A mapping exercise of all the current projects was suggested. Encouraging this sector could be an important part of raising awareness of organic food. These initiatives can also show benefits in terms of tackling social exclusion, health and well-being. People need to be equipped to participate in a new food culture.

¹ Evaluation of the progress made in the implementation of the food-based nutritional standards (*School Food: Top Marks*) and general approaches to promoting healthy eating in schools in Northern Ireland. Education & Training Inspectorate, 2010.

Lobbying: Nearly all interviewees emphasised the need to actively engage with Government. It was suggested that an Organic Lead Group is formed either to lobby on behalf of organic producers or to include consumer and other interests. One interviewee felt that lack of enthusiasm for the organic sector from the Ulster Farmers' Union would be a barrier to successful lobbying of Government. (An invitation to participate in this consultation was not responded to.) On the other hand climate change is an issue that the UFU is concerned about and they may be interested in recent work on organic farming and soil carbon. It was emphasised that it is not just DARD that needs to be engaged but other Departments and Ministers: Education, Health and Environment.

6. Conclusion

The question being addressed by this consultation process was how to grow the organic market and a food movement in Northern Ireland. Specifically, what work should the Soil Association prioritise. The consultation process covered a broad swathe of issues but it is possible to define some strong themes and preferences.

Strategic leadership of the organic sector allied to lobbying of relevant government departments and a communications strategy was important to many participants. It was felt that the organic sector is not taken seriously enough by government and public awareness needs to grow. A strategic approach to expanding organic agriculture and, indeed, putting all of our agriculture onto a sustainable footing, was seen as important.

This was related to supply issues. There is not enough NI organic produce to meet NI demand. Horticulture is particularly underdeveloped on the supply side while it is often the 'entry point' on the demand side. Expanding production in order to meet demand generated by a range of marketing initiatives is a key challenge for the sector.

That there are problems with the supply chain was clear from the two farm based meetings in particular. The issue became popularly referred to as 'the bit in the middle'. Organic producers are thinly scattered across Northern Ireland, often some distance away from equally scattered consumers. There is a significant challenge to link the two in a way that does not destroy profitability by introducing a 'middle-man' that requires too great a share of the margins available. Popular solutions were community supported agriculture and organic buying groups. A shared physical delivery/distribution system was also favoured. Farmers markets received broad support.

There was a strong theme that the Northern Ireland market for Northern Ireland produce needs to be consciously grown using 'near market' measures. The Organic UK advertising campaign was seen as one important means to this end, especially if it could be tailored to promoting an NI organic identity. Some of the proposals developed by the Organic Action Plan Group (OAPGNI) were strongly favoured, such as organic food festivals, food awards and an online consumers' food directory.

It is perhaps no real surprise that the Food for Life initiative in schools across England was seen as an inspiring model to emulate by many participants. A note of caution came from experts in school nutrition however – Northern Ireland's school meals are at a different stage of development and any Food for Life initiative here needs to take that into account.

Social exclusion was not a theme that came up very much but when it did, the points made seemed important. Many people live in 'food deserts' and this usually coincides with other manifestations of social exclusion such as health inequalities. Access to affordable organic produce by such people was seen as important and some ideas on distribution were suggested. While the Food for Life work targets healthy eating in schools it should also make sure it has a positive impact on health inequality.

Finally, amongst consumers there was strong support for a range of 'grow your own' initiatives such as community gardens, allotments and land-share.

After careful consideration by Soil Association staff and the leaders of the consultation process it was concluded that two projects would be prioritised and developed into full proposals.

The first of these, 'Growing Together', is designed to enable schools to become 'hubs' of fresh, local, organic and seasonal food in their local community. It marries the popular Food for Life model with tackling supply chain issues by linking producers and consumers via the school. In practical terms this will mean helping schools achieve a 'whole school' approach to healthy eating and well-being through growing and cooking food, for example, while building direct links with organic producers through farm visits, a school based organic buying group for parents and teachers and even school based farmers markets.

The second project meets the demand for 'near market' activities by improving the visibility of organic produce, celebrating the eating of such good food, and rewarding excellence in the organic sector. In practical terms it will involve better signposting for consumers including through the web, 'Cook and Eat' stands at farmers markets and food festivals, and the establishment of the Northern Ireland Organic Food and Farming Awards.

These two projects are presented in detail in the next two sections.

Part II

Project Proposal 1: Growing Together

Schools at the heart of local food culture

1. Introduction

This proposal is the result of a research and consultation exercise undertaken by the Soil Association in February 2010. It is for a schools centred approach to changing the food culture of Northern Ireland and growing the market for fresh, seasonal, local and organic food. Schools will be supported in becoming a hub of their local food community – helping schools take a ‘whole school’ approach to healthy eating and well being, and acting as a focus for links between the pupils, parents, teachers, the local community and local organic producers.

2. Background and need

2.1. The organic sector

Organic agriculture in Northern Ireland is considerably less developed than elsewhere in the United Kingdom. 250 organic producers farm 1% of our agricultural land. This compares with 4% of land in organic production in England, Scotland and Wales². In the Republic of Ireland the figure is just over 1%. 92% of organic land is in grass with 3.7% arable in arable and a tiny 0.4% in horticulture.

The market for organic produce was worth approximately £30 million in 2008 which is just 1.4 % of the UK total sales of £2.1 billion³. Given that Northern Ireland’s population accounts for just under 3% of the UK total, organic sales in Northern Ireland are therefore running at about half the rate of those in England, Scotland and Wales.

There is clearly considerable scope for growing both the production and consumption of organic food in Northern Ireland. That there is a demand amongst both producers and consumers for growing the market and a food movement to change our food culture is strongly supported by the evidence presented in Part 1 above.

2.2. Food in Schools

In England the Soil Association is currently leading the £16.9 million Food for Life Partnership which is helping schools across England to transform their food culture. While there is good evidence that

² Organic Market Report 2009, Soil Association.

³ Ibid.

nutritional standards in Northern Ireland schools have improved significantly in recent years⁴ it is likely there is still scope for greater use of fresh, local, seasonal and organic produce in school meals. There is an even greater need for a 'whole school' approach to healthy eating and well-being. While there is anecdotal evidence that a number of schools are making good progress on this, they are clearly in the minority.

2.3. The policy context

A number of government policies are relevant to this proposal. They include:

- Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme 2007-13. DARD
- First steps towards sustainability. 2006. OFMDFM.
- Food in Schools: draft for consultation. September 2009. DENI, DHSSPS.
- Investing for Health. 2002. DHSSPS
- Fit Futures: Focus on Food, Activity and Young People. 2006. DHSSPS.
- Education (School Development Plan) Regulations, 2005.
- Extended schools – schools, families, communities – working together. DENI

2.4. The consultation findings

The consultation process showed strong support for working with schools, building on the experience of the Food for Life Partnership in England. It also showed strong support for shortening the supply chain and building direct relationships between producers and consumers. The concept of schools as 'hubs' of local food communities lies at the heart of the Growing Together project. It brings these two themes together in a way that marries changing the food culture in schools with similar change in local communities, thus expanding the market for local organic produce and providing opportunities for organic producers to work together to meet the new demand.

3. Vision, aim and objectives

Vision: that every school acts as a focus for transforming food culture in Northern Ireland giving pupils, teachers, parents, caterers, farmers, growers and the wider community the opportunity to benefit from a growing market in fresh, seasonal, local and organic food.

Aim: to support school communities and organic producers in making schools into centres of change in food culture.

Objectives:

- a. achieve progress towards goal of fresh, local, seasonal and organic school meals;
- b. improve access to fresh, local, seasonal and organic food for schools and their local communities;

⁴ Evaluation of the progress made in the implementation of the food-based nutritional standards(School Food: Top Marks) and general approaches to promoting healthy eating in schools in Northern Ireland. Education & Training Inspectorate, 2010.

- c. grow the market for organic produce through developing direct relationships between producers and consumers.

4. Project outline

- 4.1. 'Growing Together' is a school centred approach to changing the food culture of Northern Ireland and growing the market for fresh, seasonal, local and organic food. Every school and every organic producer will have the opportunity to become involved.
- 4.2. The project will support schools in becoming a hub of their local food community by becoming leaders in changing food culture within the school and beyond; growing and cooking food at school; building links with local producers; working with caterers to improve school meals; and providing opportunities for parents, teachers and the wider community to access fresh, seasonal, local and organic produce. Local organic producers will be assisted in working together to supply the school hubs with produce and to work as partners in developing educational and cultural links with each school food community.
- 4.3. Schools will be able to participate at three different levels. Web-based and printed resources will be made available for any school to begin their own journey towards the goal of changing the food culture in school and in the local area. They will also be able to participate in initiatives that connect them to other schools such as competitions and training events.
- 4.4. 20 schools will be able to register for support from a development worker who will visit the school to provide information and advice. Six schools will be selected as 'flagship' schools and will receive regular support from a development worker and school gardener. In return they will share best practice.
- 4.5. The delivery model will seek to extract maximum benefit from the minimum of resources by presenting participants with information on which they can act independently and encouraging schools to choose from a menu of options for development which in turn will inform what training will be provided centrally by staff. Significant staff support will also be focussed on a small number of schools.
- 4.6. Producers will be supported in maximising new routes to market via the school hub concept. There will be a particular emphasis on producer collaboration and providing training to enable participation in unfamiliar market models.
- 4.7. Critical to the success of the project will be its relevance to the priorities and goals of each school. Activities such as growing and cooking can contribute directly to curricular goals as can pupil involvement in organising a farmers' market or administering an organic buying group. The project can also provide opportunities for collaboration between schools as part of Education for Mutual Understanding. The project is a sound basis for a whole school approach to child health and well-being and can help schools deliver on their statutory duty.
- 4.8. Participation will be broadly based, providing opportunities for involvement by pupils, teaching and other school staff, parents, organic producers, caterers, school governors and community

groups. Growing Together presents an opportunity to tackle social exclusion as manifested in severe health inequalities in Northern Ireland by specifically targeting support on schools with a high entitlement to free school meals. At least a third of the supported and flagship schools will fall into this category. Partnerships with appropriate agencies and community groups will be secured in order to ensure successful delivery.

4.9. The key outputs will be:

- a web-site with a full suite of online resources;
- competitions and awards;
- training events;
- school visits;
- demonstration school gardens;
- facilitated meetings;
- producer collaboration; and
- a high profile youth conference – ‘The Future of Food’.

4.10. Growing Together will run for three years initially. By the end of this period significant progress will have been made towards the goal of fresh, local, seasonal and organic school meals; there will be significantly improved access to fresh, local, seasonal and organic food for schools and their local communities; and new direct routes to market will have been established for organic produce.

5. Project description

5.1. PROJECT INITIATION

Identify partner organisations and negotiate partnerships for development and delivery of specific elements of the project.

Research and identify links to NI school curriculum.

5.2. WORK PACKAGE A: ENABLE ALL SCHOOLS TO EMBARK UPON THE ‘GROWING TOGETHER’ INITIATIVE THROUGH THE PROVISION OF INFORMATION AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRAINING AND PARTICIPATION

Task 1: Establish web-site with NI specific guidance and advice alongside links to other resources in particular the Food for Life Partnership and Soil Association sites.

- Research content of website to include: information on relevant government policies and standards; guidance on links to curriculum; existing best practice in NI; database/map of organic producers interested in establishing links with schools; signposting to external sites; opportunity to register participation.
- Create short ‘You-Tube’ videos of best practice.
- Design and create website.
- Launch website and promote through range of communications channels including new media and social networking sites.

Task 2: Engage key stakeholders (head teachers, teachers, school governors, parents, organic producers, caterers, community groups) face to face in relevant forums.

- Secure opportunities to speak at relevant meetings and conferences.
- Write articles for professional and trade publications and websites.

Task 3: Assess demand for and deliver training events.

- Assess demand for training based on plans of participating schools and needs of producers.
- Deliver four training events each year drawn from the following subjects:
 - Cooking for schools
 - Sourcing and food preparation for caterers
 - Establishing links with local producers
 - Setting up an organic buying group
 - Growing in the local community
 - School farmers markets

Task 4: Provide schools with opportunities for practical participation as part of a community of schools. Schools can be motivated and commitment built through, for example:

- Award for the best school garden .
- Free seeds – grow a pumpkin.
- Apple tree competition – free tree.

5.3. WORK PACKAGE B: ASSIST 20 SCHOOLS IN GETTING STARTED WITH THE GROWING TOGETHER PROJECT

Task 5: Give presentations to 20 schools on establishing a School Nutrition Action Group, developing a whole school food policy, and the different options available in the ‘Growing Together’ initiative.

- Prepare presentations appropriate to school type.
- Deliver presentations.
- Ensure one third of schools assisted have a high entitlement to free school meals (30% or more).

Task 6: Make 12 return visits to schools wishing to take things further.

- Respond to requests from schools for further advice.
- Identify potential ‘flagship’ schools.

5.4. WORK PACKAGE C: SUPPORT ESTABLISHMENT OF 6 GROWING TOGETHER FLAGSHIP SCHOOLS.

Task 7: Facilitate school-based meetings of local stakeholders including organic producers

- Assist school in identifying participants.
- Organise participation of local organic producers.
- Facilitate series of meetings.

- Provide ongoing support for projects chosen by school.

Task 8: Provide hands on assistance with establishing a demonstration standard school garden

- Work alongside teachers, pupils and parents to establish a school garden/edible school yard suitable as a model for other schools.

5.5. WORK PACKAGE D: SUPPORT PRODUCERS IN DEVELOPING THE SCHOOL FOCUSED SUPPLY CHAIN

Task 9: Facilitate collaboration between producers

- Build local networks of organic producers to supply school food hubs.

Task 10: Assess need and deliver training events

- Assess need for training by surveying participating schools and interested producers.
- Deliver four training events each year drawn from the following subjects:
 - Farm visits
 - Supplying organic buying groups
 - Supplying caterers

Task 11: Provide regular news and information to producers on emerging opportunities from ‘Growing Together’ project.

- Issue quarterly Growing Together producer bulletin – paper format.

5.6. WORK PACKAGE E: DISSEMINATE BEST PRACTICE AND LEARNINGS FROM WORK PACKAGES A, B, C AND D.

Task 12: Update web-site with best practice and learnings as they emerge (see Work Package A, Task 1)

- Collect information from participating schools.

Task 13: Organise events for all participating school communities and producers to share experience.

- Organise regionally focussed half day information and experience sharing events for schools.
- Organise regionally focussed information and experience sharing events for organic producers.

Task 14: Publicise success of Growing Together and raise awareness amongst wider public.

- Deliver high profile conference - The Future of Food - with strong focus on youth participation and including all stakeholders in Growing Together.
- Design and deliver communications strategy to publicise successes of Growing Together via a range of traditional and new media.

6. Project outputs and outcomes

The table below details the timeline of each of the project outputs together with the associated outcomes. See section 7 for project impacts.

Month	Outputs	Outcomes
<u>WORK PACKAGE A: ENABLE ALL SCHOOLS TO EMBARK UPON THE 'GROWING TOGETHER' INITIATIVE THROUGH THE PROVISIONS OF INFORMATION AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRAINING AND PARTICIPATION</u>		
Task 1: Establish web-site with NI specific guidance and advice alongside links to other resources in particular the Food for Life Partnership and Soil Association sites.		
1-2	> Website providing access to comprehensive information and resources	> All schools enabled to participate in Growing Together
Task 2: Engage key stakeholders (head teachers, teachers, school governors, parents, organic producers, caterers, community groups) face to face in relevant forums.		
1-18	> Presentations > Published articles and features	> 100 schools register participation in Growing Together
Task 3: Assess demand for and deliver training events.		
6-36	> 4 training events each year	> Participants equipped to pursue chosen projects
Task 4: Provide schools with opportunities for participation alongside other Growing Together schools.		
6-36	> Low maintenance competitions and awards	> Schools motivated to participate
<u>WORK PACKAGE B: ASSIST 20 SCHOOLS IN GETTING STARTED WITH THE GROWING TOGETHER PROJECT</u>		
Task 5: Give presentations to 20 schools on establishing a School Nutrition Action Group, developing a whole school food policy, and the different options available in the 'Growing Together' initiative.		
3-36	> 20 school visits > Of which at least 6 visits to schools with 30% or more pupils entitled to free school meals	> 20 schools actively participating in Growing Together > 6 schools with high levels of social exclusion actively participating in Growing Together
Task 6: Make 12 return visits to schools wishing to take things further.		
3-36	> Further advice and assistance provided	> 6 flagship schools committed
<u>WORK PACKAGE C: SUPPORT ESTABLISHMENT OF 6 'GROWING TOGETHER' FLAGSHIP SCHOOLS.</u>		
Task 7: Facilitate school-based meetings of local stakeholders including organic producers		
4-36	> Facilitated meetings > Project advice and support	> 6 schools actively participating as flagships > 6 organic producers or groups of producers supplying flagship schools
Task 8: Provide hands on assistance with establishing a demonstration standard school garden		
6-24	> Advice and practical gardening support	> 4 demonstration standard school gardens

WORK PACKAGE D: SUPPORT ORGANIC PRODUCERS IN DEVELOPING THE SCHOOL FOCUSED SUPPLY CHAIN

Task 9: Facilitate collaboration between organic producers

1-36	> Facilitated producer meetings	> Producers enabled to supply schools and associated buying groups and farmers markets participating in 'Growing Together' > Expanded market for organic produce
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Task 10: Assess need and deliver training events for organic producers

6-36	> 4 training events	> Producers enabled to maximise benefits of relationships with school food hubs
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Task 11: Provide regular news and information to producers on emerging opportunities from 'Growing Together' project.

6-36	> Printed and email news bulletin	> Producers enabled to react to development of Growing Together in schools in their area
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WORK PACKAGE E: DISSEMINATE BEST PRACTICE AND LEARNINGS FROM WORK PACKAGES A, B, C AND D.

Task 12: Update web-site with best practice and learnings as they emerge

6-36	> Regular updates to website	> Participants able to learn from others and implement best practice
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Task 13: Organise events for all participating school communities and producers to share experience.

9-36	> Information and experience sharing events for schools > Information and experience sharing events for producers	> Participants enabled to learn directly from others in own area and build networks for mutual support and business opportunities
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Task 14: Publicise success of Growing Together and raise awareness amongst wider public.

6-36	> Future of Food Conference (Month 30) > Regular and targeted media exposure	> Raised public awareness of Growing Together and benefits of fresh, seasonal, local and organic food.
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7. Project impacts

Impacts (positive changes that would not otherwise have taken place) are expected in the following areas:

- Education (e.g. knowledge of food and how it is produced, enterprise, practical cooking and growing skills).
- Pupil well-being and health.
- Food culture (attitudes to healthy eating and environmental impacts of food; relationships between producers and consumers).
- Market for organic produce (e.g. size of market; length of supply chain).

A methodology will be developed to measure the impacts of the project on participant groups and the market.

8. Resources

The delivery of this programme will be achieved through the employment of 1.5 full time equivalent staff. This will comprise a Project Officer (0.8FTE), a Project Assistant (0.4 FTE) and a Project Manager (0.1 FTE). A breakdown of annual expenditure is shown below.

The Food for Life Partnership in England (FFLP) has an impressive website of resources for schools participating in their programme. While schools in Northern Ireland cannot sign up to the programme the FFLP has agreed that the resources on the web-site are available for this project to use.

Item	Y1	Y2	Y3	Total	Notes
Project Manager (0.1 FTE)	3861	3861	3861	11583	0.1 FTE
Project Officer (0.8 FTE)	25272	25272	25272	75816	0.8 FTE
Project Assistant (0.4 FTE)	8424	8424	8424	25272	0.4 FTE
Recruitment	2000			2000	
Office & staff overheads	22000	18000	18000	58000	
Web design	4000			4000	
Videos	2000			2000	
Gardening advice	1000	1000	1000	3000	
Bulletin	500	500	500	1500	
Training events	3000	4000	4000	11000	
Info sharing events	500	1000	1000	2500	
Training materials	500	500	500	1500	
Competitions/awards	500	500	500	1500	
Conference			5000	5000	
Total	73557	63057	68057	204671	

9. Potential funding sources

A brief investigation of potential funding has produced the results below. Educational funding has not been researched. A thorough assessment of all potential funders using NICVA's Grant Tracker programme will be carried out by Soil Association staff.

9.1. NI Regional Food Programme

This is due to re-open in April 2010 and it is probable that elements of this proposal could be eligible for funding.

9.2. Supply Chain Development Programme of the NIRDP

Up to 50 days facilitation and mentoring are available for groups of producers undertaking new supply chain initiatives. This could substitute for some of the time allocated to the project officer role. Cash assistance for groups is also available up to £5,000 for training.

9.3. Lottery

Big Lottery funding in Northern Ireland uses different criteria to England and therefore a Food for Life project would not be funded in its entirety here. Nevertheless, there may be scope for Big Lottery funding for elements of the project that target schools and communities in areas of social exclusion.

The Awards for All programme could fund an element of the project up to a maximum of £10,000.

9.4. Esmée Fairbairn Foundation

The Foundation has a 'Food' funding strand as well as its Main Fund. The Food strand excludes 'work that takes place primarily in schools' although the non-school elements of the proposal may be of interest. The Main Fund has a much broader remit and this project appears to be a good fit with the aims of the fund.

Part III

Project Proposal 2: Celebrate Organic

Promotion and Celebration of Northern Ireland Local & Organic

1. Background and need

Organic growth in NI

- 1.1. Organic and local supply chains, and the community involvement on which they depend, do not have a high profile and are relatively isolated in Northern Ireland. They operate in competition with supermarkets and large processors, and typically have limited opportunity to promote their availability and tell the real stories of good food and farming that they represent.
- 1.2. Direct sales through farmers' markets and farm shops, as well as supply to food service and public procurement, all provide a vital outlet for an important sector of organic farmers and growers. Local and direct trading keeps money in the local economy; research in Cornwall has revealed that for every £10 spent on an organic box scheme, £24 is generated in the local economy. By comparison, every £10 spent in a supermarket generates only £12 for the local food economy. The same would apply to both farmers' markets and farm shops, where the producer retains all of the retail value of the crop – far more than the farm-gate price. Local food economies also bring producers and consumers closer together, allowing for social dialogue based around the importance of food, both to culture and heritage.
- 1.3. The proportion of organically farmed land and the value of the organic retail market are both substantially smaller in NI than in other parts of the UK, although the annual rate of growth was higher in NI up to 2008. In NI the area of organically managed land is 1% of the total agricultural area, one quarter of the average for Great Britain of 4%. If NI were to achieve this average, there would be 45,000 ha of converted land (as against 11,000ha in 2010) occupied by 900 farmers and growers (as against 250 in 2010).
- 1.4. The organic retail market in 2010 in NI is estimated to be £30million, with direct sales through farmers' markets, box schemes, farm shops, food service and leisure and tourism worth an estimated £1.25 million. Expert forecasts predict that there is substantial growth potential for organic production in NI; with estimates of a four-fold increase in organic milk production, doubling of beef, sheep and vegetables with smaller increases predicted for poultry (meat and eggs) and cereals by 2012⁵. The majority of this production will continue to be supplied to NI and GB consumers through large multiple retail and processing businesses. The vision for this project is to enable a greater prominence of fresh, seasonal and local food that involves a direct link between the organic producer and consumer, providing a viable way to improve the sustainability of food and farming systems.

⁵ NI Organic Development Strategy 2009 – 2012. Organic Action Plan Group NI.

- 1.5. Knowing the story behind our food, meeting farmers at the market and seeing how the money we spend is supporting a sustainable food chain supplying fresh, seasonal food helps consumers pay attention to where their food comes from. Locally based food systems have shorter and therefore more secure and resilient supply chains. Local sourcing involves fewer hidden road and air miles and less need for refrigeration en route. Food bought this way tends to be cheaper, fresher and retain more nutrients. Sourcing locally, whether from a farmers' market, box scheme or farm shop, provides an opportunity to experiment with varieties and support the heritage of different breeds of animals and varieties of plants.

Outcome of consultation – priorities for local and community action

- 1.6. The consultation⁶ revealed an interest in targeted near market initiatives that could be implemented at many levels. Those participating in the consultation recognized the importance of maintaining and developing local and direct markets since direct supply to consumers can increase financial returns to producers. To achieve this requires better communication of the availability and community relevance of the direct producer/consumer relationships on which such markets depend. An identity for NI organic produce was agreed to be necessary, and the opportunity to link with the Organic UK promotional bid (an EU Commission initiative) to achieve this was highlighted as a specific opportunity if the bid is successful. The promotion through organic awards and food festivals could provide the platform to achieve this with a focus on small farmers and strengthening community links through community participation in growing organic produce and cooking it. Grassroots initiatives such as the City Mission provide a good example.
- 1.7. Consequently, the focus that has been selected for this near market project is to work at a community level to support the promotion of the limited number of organic local and direct supply chains (farmers' markets, farms shops and food service, leisure and tourism outlets) in NI through existing outlets.
- 1.8. The consultation also emphasized the opportunity for the supply of fresh, seasonal and local food to schools (and possibly hospitals) through public procurement from organic producers. Although the proposed project does not specifically address this opportunity, raising the profile of local supply chains as proposed, through signposting, celebrating and telling locally relevant stories at farmers' markets, farm shops, food service, leisure and tourism outlets will stimulate interest in the potential development of local, fresh and seasonal public procurement.

2. Vision, aim and objectives

Vision: To enable a greater prominence of fresh, seasonal, local and organic food in Northern Ireland that is supplied through direct links between the organic producer and consumer to deliver sustainability, social, cultural and economic benefits.

Aim: Enable grass roots and community engagement with local organic food supply chains to strengthen and promote food culture and heritage.

⁶ Outcome of consultation – see Part II of this report.

Objectives:

- a. Improve organic and local visibility – work with existing directories and listings of farmers’ markets and farm shops in NI to highlight organic producers with common strap line, create digital presence to spread stories.
- b. Celebrate and eat organic – in one region (working with local council cluster), present 6 ‘Cook It, Eat It’ field kitchens at one farmers’ market and at one a regional food festival.
- c. Reward excellence – initiate NI based Organic Food Awards to celebrate and communicate NI organic production.

3. Project description

- 3.1. Three themes form the basis of the ‘grass-roots’ campaign outlined in this project proposal:
 - Strengthen links between producers and consumers of fresh, seasonal and local organic food in NI, through better and consistent signposting and visibility of farm shops and farmers’ markets and food service, leisure and tourism outlets (Workpackage A);
 - Improve the communication and promotion of fresh, seasonal and local organic food consumption emphasizing the associated Irish food culture and heritage benefits through events at a local and community level, including farmers’ markets and food festivals (Workpackage B);
 - Initiate NI organic food awards to enable local producers’ stories to be told (Workpackage C)
- 3.2. The proposed project approach is responding to the need to communicate the presence of organic and local supply chains as a means to encourage a higher visibility at a local and community level. It is expected that this will strengthen organic and local supply chains and provide positive stories that will serve as a vehicle to communicate organic messages.
- 3.3. There has been a progressive erosion of local food supply chains, associated with an increasing dominance of supermarkets. However, in Northern Ireland this transformation has been relatively recent and is still not as complete as in the rest of the UK; there is still a relatively greater importance of independent and small chain stores. In NI as in the rest of the UK, the impact of the rapid expansion of supermarkets on local food economies has been the same. The decline of high street shops, the loss of local markets and shops, seems unstoppable. Farmers’ markets, farm shops and box schemes represent a socially and culturally important alternative that should be protected and promoted. More and more communities are beginning to rebuild themselves by strengthening their links to the land and the local economy. This way of producing, buying and selling fresh, seasonal and local organic food within communities is an exciting trend in food systems. It is based on a recognition that we can no longer afford the luxury of being dislocated from our food supply, instead ensuring that partnerships are built between farmers and the local community. These provide multiple mutual benefits, not least enabling people to reconnect to the land where their food is grown.
- 3.4. The proposed project will firstly connect the existing network of 11 farmers’ markets and the organic producers that supply them, farm shops on organic farms as well as food service, leisure and tourism outlets in NI. It will develop improved signposting through existing listings (web and paper based, including a promotional flyer linked to the organic certificate and trading schedule) and communicate the real food stories that these represent using a range of media. A

further measure will be the use of the certificate from the accrediting body (and the accompanying trading schedule that lists which products on the farmers' market stall or farm shop are certified organic). On market stalls, or where loose organic produce is sold, the seller should display this document, which has potential to more effectively signpost the organic production system, thus helping consumers to recognise and value the attributes of the sustainable food they are buying.

- 3.5. Secondly, the project focuses on local and small-scale community based organic supply chains, particularly farmers' markets and farm shops. To highlight these local and direct supply chains, cookery and food demonstrations involving farmers' market stallholders will be implemented and make links with school based grow and eat. This will be done in one local authority cluster but will provide a scalable model for replication in other locations.
- 3.6. Finally, to promote the fresh seasonal and local food supplied by organic producers in NI, the existing NIFDA food awards will be expanded to include a full Organic Food and Farming category for organic produce, best organic farmer and best local food initiative. Currently the NIFDA includes a single organic category, sponsored by the NI Regional Food Programme.
- 3.7. The success of the project depends on mobilising organic producers who currently meet the demand for fresh, seasonal and local organic produce through farmers' markets, farm shops and food service, leisure and tourism outlets. The key outputs will be:
 - Clear messages and signposting for fresh, seasonal, local organic food, enabling closer contact between producers and consumers in NI;
 - Website and hard copy promotion in NI listings and associated flyer incorporating organic certificate for display at all stalls and outlets;
 - Engagement of school and community groups in one NI local council cluster through growing at school and cooking and eating at a farmers' market (scalable model will be developed);
 - Internet presence telling stories about NI local and organic food and direct supply;
 - Raised profile of NI local and direct organic supply chains;
 - Organic food awards presented to highlight the best in NI fresh, seasonal and local organic food in NI.

4. Project Workplan

The project includes three work packages to achieve the objectives:

1. Improve visibility of organic, local and direct supply chains in NI
2. Organic and local - Celebrate and eat at farmers' markets & food festivals
3. Reward Excellence in NI organic food and farming – NI organic food awards

A series of five linked tasks are planned within these three work packages, the project commences with an initiation phase. The timing of the tasks over the 16 month implementation of the project is provided in Table 1 and a detailed description of each task follows.

Table 1: Time plan: Promotion and Celebration of NI Organic and Local

Task		Months from start																
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
Initiation		█																
A: Improve visibility of organic, local & direct supply chains in NI																		
1	Provide clear signposts for local organic food in NI, to be promoted through existing organic outlets (at 11 farmers' markets and six farm shops) using common strapline.	█																
2	Through website updates, provide links between entries for organic supply chains in three NI listings.		█															
3	Spreading stories of good news through digital media using Facebook, Twitter and You Tube, signposting and promoting farmers' markets, food festivals and events.						█											
B: Organic and Local – Celebrate & Eat																		
4	Create 'Cook and Eat' stand at farmers' market and food festival, linking with community and school groups to highlight and communicate local food culture and heritage.	█																
C: Reward Excellence in NI Organic Food & Farming – Organic Food Awards for NI																		
	With NI Food and Drink Awards, expand the organic section to include organic producers and suppliers in 2011						█											

PROJECT INITIATION

Review possible working partners and draw up comprehensive contact list.

Confirm working partners for delivery of tasks.

WORK PACKAGE A: IMPROVE VISIBILITY OF ORGANIC, LOCAL AND DIRECT SUPPLY CHAINS IN NI

Task 1: Signposting – farmers’ markets and farm shops and food service, leisure and tourism outlets

Provide clear signposting of local and organic food in NI using a simple leaflet, to be promoted through existing organic outlets (at 11 farmers markets and six farm shops and food service, leisure and tourism outlets) using common strap line, possibly the EU approved organic promotion slogan: *“Good for nature, good for you”*. This slogan was developed by the EU Commission as part of an organic promotion toolbox⁷ for use throughout all EU member states. Other slogans are also included in the EU Toolbox, for example: *“The natural choice; In goodness we trust; Simply good; Wickedly good”*. The flyer would be associated in display with the organic certificate and trading schedule of the stall-holder or farm shop.

The EU Organic Promotion toolbox also includes several relevant messages regarding local food, for example: *“Organic farming allows opportunities for members of the food supply chain to reconnect with consumers; Organic products meet consumer demand for authentic, high quality and tasty food”*. These messages could be used to provide an officially recognised and neutral source of information to promote one direct way in which consumers can buy direct from farmers and growers in their local communities.

Action

- Produce flyer (possibly based on the EU approved *“Good for nature, good for you”* slogan and other EU Organic Promotion toolbox material) for display at 11 NI farmers’ markets organic stall-holders and six farm shops, include in design brief incorporation of display of organic certificate and trading schedule
- Contact organic producers at 11 farmers’ markets and 6 farm shops, use existing networks to circulate and promote flyer and display instructions

Task 2: Signposting - NI food listings

Through website updates, provide links between entries for organic supply chains in 3 NI listings⁸

Action

- Meet with NIFDA, UFU and NI Environment Link to determine potential for better signposting and messaging (including farmers’ markets, farm shops, food service and accommodation) through enhanced web links in their listings; define key issues and how their current needs can be met.
- Specify and implement an agreed approach using web links to existing sites, subject to resource availability.

Task 3: Viral promotion (month 6-16)

Spreading stories of good news through digital media to provide content through Facebook and Twitter signposting and promoting farmers’ markets, food festivals and events.

⁷ See [EU Organic Promotion Toolbox](#)

⁸ See [Taste of Ulster](#), [UFU](#), [NI Environment Link](#)

Action

- Establish Facebook and Twitter group for organic and local food through 11 farmers' markets and six farm shops in NI
- Produce five short (30-120 second) amateur video clips working with school and community groups in one region through Facebook, Twitter and You Tube telling the story of '*Grow some Potatoes*' (see Task 4).

WORK PACKAGE B: ORGANIC AND LOCAL – CELEBRATE AND EAT

Task 4: Cook and Eat at farmers' market and food festival

Create a '*Cook and Eat*' stand at farmers' market and food festival in one region (local council cluster, possibly Newry and Mourne) and at the '*Good Food is in Our Nature*' stand at Balmoral. Linking with community and school groups '*Grow some Potatoes*' activity with '*Harvest in September*' and '*Sow in May*' themes to highlight and communicate local food culture and heritage using organic and local production and supply.

Action

- Establish '*Cook and Eat*' stand for use at one farmers' market with local supplier(s), timetable, equipment hire, local cook/chef, school kitchen, community coordinator
- Establish '*Grow some Potatoes*' activity with three school and two community groups in one region, supply seeds and growing instructions/support.
- Do '*Cook and Eat*' at the farmers' market six times between June 2010 and October 2011 (16 months); twice during "*Harvest in September*" in both 2010 and 2011 and twice during "*Sow in May*" in 2010. Working with local supplier(s), community, church and school groups (to include school '*Grow some Potatoes*' activity from seed).
- Do '*Cook and Eat*' at one Food Festival (e.g.⁹ Garden Gourmet, Belfast Food & Drink, Festival of Fish, Auld Lammas Fair) and on the '*Good Food is in Our Nature*' stand at Balmoral. Working with local supplier(s), community, church and school groups.

WORK PACKAGE C: REWARD EXCELLENCE IN NI ORGANIC FOOD AND FARMING

Task 5: Implement NI Organic Food Awards 2011

Working in partnership with NI Food and Drink Awards¹⁰, expand the organic section to include: Best Farm Shop and Farmers' Market, Best Local Food Initiative, Best Producer, Organic food and drink category awards.

Action

- Agree with NIFDA joint development of organic food awards for 2011 alongside NIFDA biennial awards, last in 2009
- Define categories and criteria, promote and launch call for entries
- Judging and presentation of awards

⁹ See [Food Festival listing](#)

¹⁰ See [NIFDA Awards](#)

5. Project outputs and outcomes

The table below details the project outputs together with the associated outcomes. See section 6 for project impacts.

Month	Outputs	Outcomes
<u>WORK PACKAGE A: IMPROVE VISIBILITY OF ORGANIC, LOCAL AND DIRECT SUPPLY CHAINS IN NI</u>		
Task 1: Provide clear signposts for local organic food in NI, to be promoted through existing organic outlets (at 11 farmers' markets and six farm shops) using common strapline.		
1-6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Common strap line & uniform identity to improve recognition > Listing & contact points for all farmers' markets, farm shops and food service, leisure and tourism outlets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Improved signposting of organic and local supply chains in NI at farmers' markets & farm shops etc. > Better links between producers and consumers
Task 2: Through website updates, provide links between entries for organic supply chains in three NI listings.		
3-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Better links between organic local supply chain through websites of existing NI listings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Improved perception of organic local food with NI listings > Better links between producers and consumers
Task 3: Spreading stories of good news through digital media using Facebook, Twitter and You Tube, signposting and promoting farmers' markets, food festivals and events.		
6-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Facebook, Twitter and You Tube presence for NI organic local food > 5 video stories – growing & eating potatoes in schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Access digital media audience through Facebook and Twitter users to communicate NI organic and local > Communicate good stories in cheap and modern way – media coverage
<u>WORK PACKAGE B: ORGANIC AND LOCAL – CELEBRATE AND EAT</u>		
Task 4: Create 'Cook and Eat' stand at farmers' market and food festival, linking with community and school groups to highlight and communicate local food culture and heritage.		
1-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Cook and Eat stand tool kit for use at events > Local schools <i>Grow Some Potatoes</i> activity > Press & viral coverage of activities and events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Strengthened relations in community through celebration of local food culture in one region > Enhanced profile of local organic food in one region, with community, church & school groups through <i>Grow Some Potatoes</i> activity > Model for celebrate & eat events usable in other regions

WORK PACKAGE C: REWARD EXCELLENCE IN NI ORGANIC FOOD AND FARMING – ORGANIC FOOD AWARDS FOR NI

Task 5: With NI Food and Drink Awards, expand the organic section to include organic producers and suppliers in 2011

6-15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Agreed award criteria & judging template > Food Award presentation event and press coverage telling winners' stories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Raised profile of NI organic through NI Organic Food and Drink Awards in 2011 > Enhanced perception of organic within NIFDA
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6. Project impacts

Four key impacts are foreseen:

- Direct markets for fresh, seasonal, local and organic food in NI will be highlighted, supporting alternatives to supermarket supply chains.
- Links between consumers will be strengthened, exploiting the potential of the existing network of supply chains through farmers' markets, farm shops, food service and leisure and tourism.
- Community and school activities, with growing, cooking and eating activity at a farmers' market and food festival, providing a scalable model for other farmers' markets and food festivals in NI.
- News stories, telling of the best practice in fresh, seasonal, local and organic food in NI through NI Organic Food Awards.

7. Resources

Task	Description	Days	£
Initiation & project management	Review & agree working partners	3	1,000
	Coordination and management	7	2,500
1	Flyer & strap line	15	8,000
	Circulate & promote	8	3,000
2	Meet NI list holders (NIFDA, UFU, NIEL) & define key issues	2	700
	Implement weblinks in existing sites	7	2,000
3	Establish Facebook and Twitter groups	4	2,000
	Video clips (30-120 seconds) working with schools – Grow a Pumpkin activity	30	10,000
4	Establish 'Cook & Eat' stand for local farmers' market and food festival	15	5,000
	Establish 'Grow Some Potatoes' activity with school and community groups, provide seeds, growing instructions and support – use at 'Cook & Eat' at farmers' market and food festival	15	7,000
	Do 'Cook & Eat' at one farmers market (6 times) and one food festival (including organic supplier(s) costs	15	5,000

5	Define categories & criteria for NI Organic Food Awards, promote and launch call for entries	2	750
	Judging	4	3,000
	Presentation event	2	1,500
Travel	For all tasks		1,500
		Total	129
			52,950

8. Potential funding sources

Public funding sources

The proposed project could be jointly funded through the NI Regional Food and Peace III Programmes.

8.1. NI Regional Food Programme

- Due to re-open in April 2010 for project applications.
- This proposal represents a clear next step arising from the present NIRFP funded project.
- Contact: DARD – Una Hollywood T: 028 9052 4497 E: una.hollywood@dardni.gov.uk

8.2. Peace III: Peace & Reconciliation Local Action Plans

- It is possible that funding may be available, at local level only.
- Working through one identified council cluster to contribute to delivery of Peace & Reconciliation Local Action Plan. Proposal must highlight (example from Newry & Mourne):
 - Social partnerships on a cross community and cross border basis;
 - Involvement of public, private and voluntary/community sector organizations;
 - Accessible by people from all backgrounds, rural and isolated communities.
- Contact: EUPB - Ariane de Vriendt T: 028 9026 6679. E: ariane.devriendt@eupb.eu

8.3. Funding could also be sought through the Interreg IVA programme.

- This enables funding where there is a link with the border region of the Republic of Ireland and western Scotland.
- Contact: DARD Omagh - Paul Donnelly. T: 028 8224 7727

Trusts

8.4. Charitable trusts specific to NI should be searched through the NICVA directory. Specific UK charitable trusts that could support all or part of the proposed work already known are:

- Esmée Fairbairn Foundation
- Plunkett Foundation

There may be other NI specific trusts that would support community projects, particularly in Newry and Mourne in partnership with the Mourne Heritage Trust.