



# Local Food Routes

## A summary report of Food *futures*



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# Introduction



*Derek Cooper –  
journalist, presenter  
and local food advocate*

For over 30 years I have been travelling round Britain sustaining myself with the hope that one day we would all have access to seasonal produce from the countryside. Working for TV programmes like 'A Taste of Food' and 'Scotland's Larder' and Radio 4's 'The Food Programme', we found time and again that due to lack of interest local specialities were becoming increasingly unavailable. Seafood was being caught in the Western Isles and despatched to Spain. Orchards in Kent once famous for their white heart cherries had been grubbed up and replaced by mock Georgian executive town houses. At the height of the Vale of Evesham asparagus season local supermarkets sold asparagus from Portugal.

Intensive factory farming, the use of chemicals in the fields and drugs in the animal sheds, is, in the short term, extremely effective. Things do grow more quickly, pigs and poultry mature in half the time, productivity is remarkable. But treating the production of food as just another industrial activity – like making cars – diminishes it to the level of a commodity. It is deprived of its traditional cultural and historical role in society. It leads to thinking of the craftsmen and women who produce food as operatives. Farms that were once the core of rural communities have become production units and animals mere meat machines.

If you create a fiercely competitive food industry you need not be surprised at the kind of food such an industry turns out. There is an abundance of food about but it raises a low level of expectation. Indeed, as researchers Laura Mason and her colleague Catherine Brown found when they compiled their inventory of the traditional foods of Britain, very few people seem interested in the culinary aspect of their heritage. It might be expected that an account of British food would meet co-operation; information would be plentiful. But the reverse was the rule: hostility existed, official and personal, to the very idea of the investigation. With a national attitude to food bordering on indifference the success of the first stages of the campaign to localise the food chain is all the more remarkable.

Its strength lies in the decision to involve as many people and organisations as possible from the start. Food *utures* is about many things: growing produce, raising livestock, cooking, marketing and enthusing a community with the possibilities of partnership in a new approach to living. If I take Skye & Lochalsh as an example of what can be done it's because I know it better than any other part of the UK. There was a time when virtually all the food in hotels and restaurants was imported in lorries from the mainland. Visitors from Italy were offered frozen lasagne; French tourists found boeuf bourgignon on the menu. Vegetables were frozen and soup came from out of a packet. It was a farcical state of affairs on an island of crofters and fishermen. An island which raised sheep and cattle and had no abattoir; an island surrounded by sea lochs where fish were seldom sold locally. The change in the availability of fresh local produce has been dramatic. Food is firmly on the agenda and a local food network has made everyone in the area aware of how much has already been achieved and what can be done in the future.

Food is far too important to be left to giant corporations. Small is still beautiful, good husbandry goes hand in hand with good health.

*Derek Cooper*



**ORGANIC WAY**

A man in a striped shirt and khaki pants stands behind a stone wall, smiling and pointing towards the camera. In the foreground, a child in a blue hat and dark jacket with yellow and red stripes is running. To the left, a wheelbarrow with a black tire and orange rim is visible. The background shows a residential street with houses and a blue car.



# Summary

This report summarises three years' work by Food *futures* partnerships all over the UK which worked together on developing sustainable local food economies. It adds the voices of over 150 organisations and over 1,500 people around the UK to the case for local food. Their voices need to be heard and taken into account.

## Achievements

- 160 organisations involved in Food *futures* partnerships.
- Around 1,600 people directly involved in Food *futures* partnerships.
- £700,000 new funding secured so far to support future work on local food.
- £700,000 worth of funding applications currently pending.
- Over 100 new local food projects underway.

## Lessons

The devastating effects of the foot and mouth outbreak provide a context for this report that no one could have foreseen. Yet so many of the problems identified in the resulting discussions about the future of farming could be resolved through the creation of sustainable local food economies.

The report argues for more investment and action at a local, regional and national level to link the local food chain and support our farming communities. It puts forward concrete policy recommendations that, if implemented, will help create sustainable local food economies.

The report demonstrates the benefits of more food being processed and marketed locally. It encourages all of us, as consumers, to make positive and considered choices about what we buy to eat – our spending decisions could have a major positive impact on our local economies.

The Soil Association campaign – 'eat organic, buy local' – enables producers, retailers and consumers to contribute to their local food economy by taking action.

## What must be done for local food

- Create national frameworks.
- Improve the supply chain.
- Educate the public.
- Improve the regulatory context.
- Provide finance for the sector.
- Adapt trade policy.
- Obtain the facts.



A woman with long blonde hair, wearing a blue and white checkered short-sleeved shirt and black trousers, is pushing a black and blue stroller. The stroller contains two young children: a boy with curly red hair in a yellow shirt and a girl with blonde hair in a pink long-sleeved shirt. A white shopping bag with green text is hanging from the stroller's handle. The woman is holding a pink balloon and a bouquet of flowers. They are walking on a paved path next to a stone wall. The wall has a sign that reads "MARKET PLACE" and is decorated with a string of red, white, and blue pennant flags. A potted plant with red and orange flowers is visible on the right side of the wall.

# MARKET PLACE





# Local food

*If fresh food is necessary to health in man and beast, then that food must be provided not only from our own soil but as near as possible to the sources of consumption. If this involves fewer imports and consequent repercussions on exports then it is industry that must be readjusted to the needs of food. If such readjustment involves the decentralisation of industry and the re-opening of local mills and slaughter-houses, then the health of the nation is more important than any large combine.*

Lady Eve Balfour, founder of the Soil Association, 1943

## Why local food?

For over 50 years the Soil Association has been busy working in partnership with communities the length and breadth of the UK to give local people better access to local food.

In the wake of BSE and recent food scares, more and more questions were being raised concerning the future of British agriculture. The devastating effects of the foot and mouth outbreak mean there is now a more urgent need to develop a sustainable future for farming. Indeed the transport of livestock over long distances and the lack of local slaughtering facilities undoubtedly accelerated the spread of the foot and mouth virus, once it had been reported in the UK.

The impact of industrial farming on the environment and animal welfare, on landscapes and wildlife, on food quality and safety and on the cultural fabric of the nation is all too apparent. Increasingly people are demanding the adoption of more sustainable methods of food production. This desire has manifested itself through the huge increase in demand for organic food and the growing popularity of local food.

Local food is now firmly on the agenda, recognised from local authorities to farming organisations as a tool that can help deliver farm diversification, health promotion, community development and rural revival.

People are asking where the food on their plate has come from – many buy fresh local organic produce because they want their money to go direct to local organic farmers and growers. There are concerns for the welfare of animals, which are transported long distances owing to a lack of local infrastructure and markets. People are also concerned about the negative impact of food distribution systems on the environment.

International food markets can seem absurd. According to official figures available from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), in the year 2000 the UK imported 255,000 tonnes of pork and 94,000 tonnes of lamb while exporting 195,000 tonnes of pork and 98,000 tonnes of lamb. This is often the case at the national and regional level – with food being transported long distances to be processed and packaged and then returned to a retail outlet in the area where it was produced.

The Soil Association, the charity at the heart of the organic movement, has always promoted sustainable farming and food production methods that give



### Farm shops and farm gate sales

*Producers sell direct from their farm, using purpose built retail premises to cardboard boxes at the farm gate. All the food at the Organic Farm Shop (above) at Abbey Home Farm, Gloucestershire, is organic, and much of it is grown on the farm itself.*

### Farmers' markets

*Local producers sell their produce direct to shoppers in a traditional market setting. The first farmers' market was held in Bath in October 1997. There are now more than 300 regularly taking place around the whole of the UK. An estimated 15 per cent of the annual turnover of farmers' markets across the UK was from organic food sales in 2000 (The Organic Food and Farming Report 2000).*



consumers confidence in the origin of the food they eat. The Soil Association knows that the continued growth in the organic food and farming sector is built on foundations laid by dedicated farmers and growers who have been directly supplying local people with fresh, healthy and tasty organic food for many years.

Since 1998, the Soil Association has been running a UK-wide partnership project, Food *futures* to help develop more sustainable local food economies.

## What do we mean by local food?

The Soil Association has developed the following definition of a sustainable local food economy:

'A system of producing, processing and trading, primarily of organic and sustainable forms of food production, where the physical and economic activity is largely contained and controlled within the locality or region where it was produced, which delivers health, economic, environmental and social benefits to the communities in those areas'.

By purchasing food produced locally people contribute financially to their local economy and help foster a sense of community. Shopping becomes a process of engagement that links consumer to producer.

Of course, it must be recognised that not all food is available locally. Some produce cannot be grown in the UK, such as bananas or tea. Locally grown produce is often only available seasonally. Some regions and localities have traditional specialities like clotted cream and Stilton cheese. Others have local conditions more suited to producing certain products like lamb from Wales or beef from Scotland.

Some of your favourite food will never be grown locally. The concept of local food is not about restricting access to these products. It is about buying local wherever it is possible. It is about increasing access to locally produced food by devising a system that makes local food an available, accessible and affordable option for local people. It is about creating sustainable local food economies.

The UK currently has to import about 75 per cent of the organic produce sold to satisfy increasing consumer demand. Much of this food could be grown or produced locally. This will only happen if concerted action is taken to support UK organic farmers and growers.

## Feel the benefits

### Economic

*Plugging the Leaks*, a study by the New Economics Foundation shows that spending £10 in a local organic box scheme results in a £25.90 investment in the local economy. This is because a high percentage of the £10 is re-spent locally, and of this, a high proportion is spent locally again, thus having a multiplying effect. A comparative study showed that spending £10 at a supermarket results in a £14 investment locally. So, if every person, tourist and business in Cornwall switched one per cent of their current spending to local products and services this would put an extra £1 million directly into the local economy every week. The study was carried out, through Cornwall Food *futures*, at Cusgarne Organic Farm, which runs a box scheme.

If the food supply chain becomes more localised, a higher proportion of the financial and employment benefits would accrue to the producer and the local





### Local shops

*Some farms are now setting up shops in local town centres, such as Marshford Organic Produce who opened the shop above in Barnstaple. They source as locally as possible, to ensure freshness, quality and taste and to support a sustainable rural economy in their area. All corner shops and village shops could play a key role in local food economies by ensuring that they source more of their produce locally.*



### Box schemes

*Ten years ago the first UK vegetable box scheme was set up by Jan and Tim Deane in Devon. Today there are over 300 box schemes, including Slipstream in Cheltenham (box pictured above) delivering organic produce in a box or bag either direct to customers, or to community distribution points. The box scheme market is worth nearly £30 million a year (The Organic Food & Farming Report 2000).*

area. Fifty years ago, UK farmers received 50 pence in every pound consumers spent on food; today they receive about 10 pence. The rest of the value is now captured upstream, mostly away from rural areas, by processors, distributors and global retailers.

### Health

Food poverty is related both to low income and restricted access to good food. Many people have difficulty getting to shops, especially in rural areas and on deprived urban estates, due to poor public transport. Local food schemes, such as box schemes, buying groups and local shops, can improve access to good food that is fresh, less processed and likely to have improved nutrient levels due to a reduction in transport time and storage. Community food projects also encourage involvement and interest in healthy food.

Buying locally produced organic food also reduces the potential health risk from agricultural inputs such as pesticides, herbicides and fungicides in the local environment. The Soil Association's report – *Organic Farming, Food Quality and Human Health* shows how organic food is a healthier option for the consumer.

### Environment

The use of energy for transport and handling of food is estimated to be 16–21 per cent of the UK's total energy bill, contributing significantly to greenhouse gases and global warming. If the true environmental costs of distribution, handling and processing are taken into consideration, local food is not an expensive option for the consumer or society. Local food reduces food miles and transport pollution. The Soil Association's report – *The Biodiversity Benefits of Organic Farming* showed that local organic farms also increase the diversity of local landscapes and wildlife.

### Social

Local food schemes offer opportunities for bottom up planning and democratic control over local food production, increasing local ownership and participation, cross sector working and community development. Traditional varieties and recipes and local distinctiveness enhance food culture and a sense of meaning and belonging to the place where we live.



A photograph of a white rectangular sign with a black border and the words "BOX WALK" in bold black capital letters. The sign is mounted on a metal post in a grassy area. In the background, there is a large green bush with small yellow flowers, a house with a brown roof and white walls, and a string of warm white lights draped over a tree. The foreground is blurred, showing a person's arm and a basket of colorful flowers.

**BOX WALK**



# Food *futures*

## The background

Since the early 1990s, the Soil Association has promoted and supported development of the local food sector through publications, seminars, workshops and feasibility studies. Requests for more structured support led to the design of the Food *futures* project, partially funded by the National Lottery's community fund. An initial pilot project in Leicestershire between 1998 and 2000 provided the basis for a further eleven Food *futures* programmes which have run for the past three years across the UK. There were three schemes in Scotland, one in Wales, one in Northern Ireland and six in England.

They were split between urban and rural areas as follows:

- *Urban*  
East London and Nottingham.
- *Rural*  
Cornwall, Cumbria, Dumfries & Galloway, Dungannon & South Tyrone, Norfolk, Powys and Skye & Lochalsh.
- *Mixed*  
Calderdale & Kirklees and Forth Valley.

In addition to the National Lottery's community fund grant, funding was provided at the local level for both running cost and for new initiatives. This was provided by local authorities, local enterprise companies and training & enterprise councils, the voluntary sector, health authorities, health promotion bodies, development agencies and charitable trusts.

## The Food *futures* approach

The Food *futures* approach is based on community development 'best practice' – designed to be participatory, to build on local achievements and to work with a diverse group including farmers, retailers, consumers, the voluntary sector, local government and health authorities. Truly sustainable enterprises will only be realised if the people who use them are genuinely involved with their development. By their very nature the solutions need to be locally appropriate and locally owned to succeed. Thus community based food growing and distribution schemes are created, alongside networks which provide strategic support to the local food sector.

Food *futures* not only involved supporters of the organic movement. The Soil Association wished to work in partnership with others around the shared agenda of local food. This partnership will hopefully develop a local infrastructure to support local food production and distribution which will be of mutual benefit to the organic and local food sectors.



### Grow your own

*The most local food of all is grown in your window box, in your garden or on an allotment. The St Anns allotment project was set up to preserve the historic allotment garden of St Anns in Nottingham, which is the oldest and largest allotment site in the country (photograph courtesy of Colin Haynes).*

### Increased access

*Food futures projects have aimed to increase access to locally produced food in both urban and rural areas. People on low incomes spend a higher proportion of their income on food and Food futures has identified innovative ways of providing local sources of food. In Carlisle local people revived some disused city allotments to grow organic vegetables (below).*



### Participatory

Each programme began with a launch event, to gather interest and share a celebratory meal of local produce, followed by up to six participatory workshops. These were designed to map what is already happening in the area, to explore and develop a joint vision for the future and to identify issues for action. Specific projects were undertaken by small action groups, which met between workshops. A local co-ordinator disseminated information, provided administrative support for the workshops and action groups, and organised events locally.

### Networking

It is not enough for individuals to act on their own. We need to learn to work more collaboratively, to invest in developing active and effective networks, to link across different sectors, find ways to identify shared agendas and work together in appropriate partnerships. Using clear dialogue is as crucial as undertaking practical action.

Food *futures* has provided a forum, bringing together a wide range of people with similar interests in local food who would not otherwise meet, such as horticulturists and shellfish growers in Skye & Lochalsh, or the local school caterer with the health promotion worker in Cornwall. People have shared information on their various activities and made practical links 'adding value' to each other's work – like putting together a huge jigsaw in which each player has an important contribution to make, without which the picture would be incomplete.

In this way the links between different agendas have been identified. For example health sector concerns about healthy eating and heart disease prevention can be combined with a forestry department's interest in planting fruit trees in local woodlands to achieve a mutually beneficial outcome. Such cross-sector working has enabled greater mutual respect and understanding to develop among the different groups.

### Strategic

In order to localise the food chain and develop sustainable local food economies, changes are needed to ensure that local supply and demand are simultaneously stimulated. Although each Food *futures* area has unique characteristics, many of the issues and subsequent solutions identified to develop a sustainable local food economy have been similar across the UK. At the core is the need for information dissemination and clear co-ordination provided by a local co-ordinator.

## Setting goals

In order to achieve change following the principles set out for Food *futures*, the following goals were agreed for each of the programmes:

- To set up at least three new local food initiatives.
- To establish a local food network.
- To increase access to healthy, fresh food by people from disadvantaged areas and ethnic minorities.
- To develop a partnership forum with a collectively designed strategy for continuing work to develop the local food economy beyond the 18 month programme.





### Participation

*Through a participative process (undertaken in each of the Food futures areas) key barriers to the development of local food economies were discussed, key principles of working were identified and key actions were agreed. Through setting up networks of local people with a Food futures co-ordinator as a focal point, a strategic approach to the creation of local food economies was adopted which was based on identified local needs.*

### Key principles for Food futures

- Empowerment of the community.
- Building on what exists in a complementary way.
- Genuine involvement and participation.
- Strengthening local partnerships.
- Action based.
- Networking approach.
- Strategic approach.

*Food futures co-ordinators (below) played a crucial role in the success of the initiative.*



## The achievements

Food *futures* has succeeded in reaching its goals. Local people have been empowered to take action. To date the project's achievements include the following:

- Over 100 new local food projects set up (38 per cent were already planned and benefited from Food *futures*, but 62 per cent were as a direct result of Food *futures*).
- Eleven new local food networks established.
- Ten areas producing local food newsletters with 46 separate issues circulated to a total of 6,500 people.
- Over 160 organisations involved in Food *futures* partnership forums with £700,000 new funding secured so far to support future work on local food.
- Over £700,000 worth of funding applications are currently pending.
- About 1,600 people directly involved in workshops and network events including producers, growers, retailers, public sector bodies and community organisations.
- Over 5,000 local food sector contacts on databases across the UK.
- All areas continuing work on local food, including several new food links projects, with those in Powys and Forth Valley underway.

## Local actions

Food *futures* has generated a wide range of local action. Credit for this goes to the programme co-ordinators, steering groups, local activists and organisations in each area. The following summaries do not do justice to their hard work and creativity. It is unfortunate that space does not allow for a complete evaluation of each programme, as by telling a partial story we are not adequately communicating the holistic approach taken.

Some of the initiatives were a direct result of Food *futures*. Others were underway already and benefited from the support Food *futures* provided. The list below is not comprehensive but illustrates the range of local solutions around the UK. A full evaluation report will be available at a later date. For further information please contact the individual Food *futures* programme concerned using the addresses given at the end of this report.

### Calderdale & Kirklees

- Yorkshire farmers' markets steering group was formed and three new farmers' markets set up in Heckmondwike, Halifax and Hebden Bridge.
- £45,000 a year has been secured over three years, as part of the area health improvement programme, to support local food projects and to fund a local food development worker who is already in post.
- A group of voluntary sector and farming individuals set up the Grassroots Food Network for producers, growers, consumers, and community groups to develop buying groups, support smaller producers and encourage collaboration.

### Cornwall

- Local food promotion is now integral to countywide food sector strategies under development by the county council.



### Networking

*By working with different organisations with different purposes, new and stronger links have been built by Food futures which strengthen the local food economy.*

*In Nottingham a city farm has worked with adults with learning difficulties providing learning opportunities and work experience. This has now developed into a community catering project which includes food preparation skills.*

- The family centre in Camborne includes local food and healthy eating as part of its role in providing family support. The on-site café now serves local food.
- Local schools are being encouraged to use local food for their school meals.
- Two local food co-ops have been launched (two more are being developed) to enable local people to benefit from bulk purchasing and economies of scale.

### Cumbria

- The *Cumbria Organics Directory* has been published to highlight sources of locally produced organic food.
- Local food sector networking events have provided an informal forum for discussion, planning and mutual support, which was particularly valuable in the light of the outbreak of foot and mouth disease.
- A network has formed of cooks, processors, and producers preparing high quality dishes with fresh local produce for a wide range of catering needs.
- Local food in schools – a resource pack is being prepared for schools wanting to supply more local produce in schools meals and breakfast clubs.

### Dungannon & South Tyrone

- A survey was undertaken of small shops and mini-markets in Clogher Valley and Fivemile Town area to encourage interest in stocking a range of local products.
- Development of database of local producers in North Armagh and South Tyrone.
- An organic awareness evening for potentially interested producers was organised with Greenmount College in January 2001 and generated 16 new enquiries about converting to organic farming.
- Three issues of a local food newsletter were sent out to 119 local food contacts.

### Dumfries & Galloway

- A community garden scheme with links to a local café is planned for an area of waste ground on a deprived estate. There has been consultation on local needs, and wildlife surveys and designs have been submitted.
- A project has been started involving ten schools growing fruit and vegetables in their grounds.
- Fruit orchards have been created at two sites using local varieties of apples, plums, pears and damsons. Plans are underway to turn one orchard into an educational resource.
- Work is underway to take the local NHS Trust out of the compulsory competitive tendering process and ensure recognition of economic and health benefits of using locally sourced supplies.

### East London

- The Organic Lea Valley group has been established and taken over derelict allotments to grow organic produce for local people.
- In Redbridge new community gardens and box schemes have been set up. There are two community cafes supplied by community growing schemes and 'the organic classroom' has been developed to link schools with allotments.
- Newham Food Access Partnerships has established five food co-ops, supports twelve fruit tuck shops in schools, three breakfast clubs, one lunch club (for elderly and disabled people) and two nurseries. Supplies are to be sought from producer members of the East Anglia Food Link.

### Forth Valley

- Two local farmers have set up Slammanan Producers' Co-op. They are now growing vegetables for local consumption with a home delivery scheme.



### Educating

*Many of the Food futures partnerships have worked with local schools to increase children's awareness of the importance of food and how and where it is grown and cooked. In Dumfries & Galloway community gardens have been started in schools like the one below in Sanquhar.*





### Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

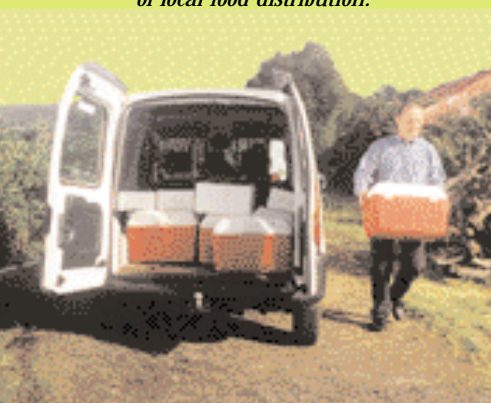
*Local people group together to support a local farm.*

*These ventures take many forms. For example the trial growing site above has been started at Beeston Farm, Cornwall. People may buy a share in an existing farm, pay in advance for a share of the harvest or set up a new community venture such as a neighbourhood allotment or commonly owned orchard.*

### Common features of Food futures programmes

- Local production, marketing and distribution.
- Support for farmers.
- Food education.
- Information and communication.
- Public procurement and institutional local sourcing.
- Market research.
- Community food projects.

*As part of Skye & Lochalsh Food futures a van has demonstrated the importance of local food distribution.*



They will also supply food co-ops, high rise flats and community cafés.

- Greater farmer participation in Stirling farmers' market was encouraged and help was given to set up the farmers' market organising group as a co-operative.
- Forth Valley Food Link has secured access to £246,000 (over three years) to implement the Forth Valley Food *futures* strategy.
- Co-ordinators are involved in work to set up a Scotland-wide food links project.

### Norfolk

- *Food For Thought* – second edition of a local food directory was published.
- Plans for a 'food and farms' week to raise public awareness of local food and related issues was postponed, due to the foot and mouth outbreak.
- Developed a web page and regular newsletters.
- The Norfolk County Council catering service provided a meal of locally sourced ingredients at a seminar on local food for local councillors.

### Nottingham

- A partnership of local organisations including a neighbourhood centre, city farm and community garden formed the community catering project. The focus is on affordable healthy cooking, using seasonal local ingredients, mainly for individuals with learning difficulties and mental health service users.
- Forest community enterprise was formed to develop a community market in an inner city area, including a local food market.
- *Notts Nosh*, a local food directory, was produced.
- Helped build a strong local food network committed to supporting and developing a local sustainable food economy.

### Powys

- The Cwm Harry Land Trust has set up a new Community Supported Agriculture venture to supply residents of Treowen and Barnfields estates in Newtown with locally grown vegetables.
- On-farm demonstrations of inspections by environmental health officers took place and helped develop an appropriate interpretation of food regulations for small local producers.
- A local food marketing campaign produced car and shop window stickers with the slogan 'are you getting it locally?'
- Powys Food Links (managed by the county council) will continue the work started by Food *futures* including providing information, advice and support to local initiatives such as processing and adding value to primary products, and community supported agriculture. It is also working to develop local and wider markets and is encouraging branding and the use of locally produced food in the hospitality and public sectors.
- Llanidloes hospital, which still does its own catering, was chosen as a pilot to investigate the legislative hurdles into putting local food on their menu.

### Skye & Lochalsh

- A weekly food links van delivering local produce to local restaurants and catering outlets has been piloted over two summer seasons.
- 'Buy local' car stickers and promotional material for shops have been printed to promote the area's clean, green environmental quality. This is part of a developing local brand – Natural Harvest of Skye & Lochalsh.
- The 'food and learning alliance' was formed to increase awareness of and the use of locally produced food through improving cooking skills, diet awareness and the promotion of career options within the hospitality sector. A mobile kitchen has been designed and constructed locally to assist in this project.



# FRESHFOOD LANE





# What must be done

Food *futures* has been run over the last three years as an action research project, that is 'learning by doing'. Many important lessons were learnt locally that will inform the future development of the local food sector and contribute to making local food an affordable reality for future generations. These lessons have been taken by the Soil Association and translated into concrete, achievable policy objectives.

Government policies on agriculture, trade liberalisation and hygiene regulations currently reward economies of scale and a 'lowest unit cost' approach. This encourages centralisation of distribution in the food chain which has enormous negative effects on our society. The Soil Association advocates the adoption of the following objectives as a contribution to addressing the effects of these policies.

## Create national frameworks for local food

The government must now work to reverse this trend and create a national economic and regulatory framework that favours local trade, to ensure that local food economies grow. The framework requires:

- *Objectives*

The adoption of new agricultural and rural development objectives by the UK government, devolved administrations and the EU that include the development of local and regional food economies as a top priority.

- *Strategies*

Each level of government (central, national, regional, and local) to adopt the 'proximity principle' for the use of natural resources, which for food should be implemented through strategies for the development of the local food economy. These should cover all stages of the food chain and be fully developed and implemented with all stakeholders. They would include grants, training, information, and policy and the appointment of long-term co-ordinators.

- *National guidelines*

Best practice guidelines should be produced for the development of regional strategies, covering the processes for creating bottom-up and participatory approaches to their development, and guidance on their content and implementation.

- *Facilitators*

Experienced facilitators should operate in each area, with central co-ordination, to promote the development of the local food sector, developing the existing supply chain, the sector's organisation and new initiatives such as new farmers' markets, box schemes and co-operatives.

- *Information*

A national, funded, information strategy to provide inventories of local food suppliers and retail outlets for public and institutional purchasers.

- *Sector body*

Support for the establishment of a single body or alliance to represent the local food sector in the UK.



### Food deserts

*Many urban areas have been dubbed 'food deserts' as the decline in public transport, a low level of car ownership and the decline in local shops has meant restricted access to fresh food. In some areas there is still a good variety of local shops. These find it easier to survive by providing a combination of a good range of distinctive produce and friendly customer service. Down to Earth in Coventry (above) was set up by Suzanne Bristow.*

### Demonstration farms

*Visit a Soil Association's demonstration farms to discover how organic farms work in harmony with nature to produce good food. Most of these also have their own shops, box schemes or even cafés, offering the chance to taste farm produce and discover a new way of shopping for organic local food.*



### Improve the supply chain for local food

- Develop the supply chain infrastructure to support the local food sector by creating a network of small abattoirs, processing facilities and dairies in each region.
- Existing retail outlets and catering businesses should be encouraged to source local food by encouraging wholesalers to provide local food or establishing links with local producers.
- Bodies responsible for public purchasing, such as schools and hospitals, should try to use local and organic suppliers; for example they could hold workshops on the contract requirements and tendering process for local producers.

### Educate the public about local food

- Invest in consumer education and awareness raising, including the benefits of local, organic and unprocessed food and the opportunities for purchasing local, seasonal food.
- Support for the establishment of a network of local organic demonstration farms so the public can find out more about organic farming.
- Food growing and cookery should be restored to the national curriculum.

### Improve the regulatory context for local food

- Review all planning guidance to remove barriers to the development of the local food sector, for example the rules affecting 'change of use' of farm buildings to allow for food sector activities.
- Ensure hygiene and health & safety regulations and charges are appropriate to business size and health risk, and train enforcement officers to ensure the regulations are interpreted in a practical and consistent way.
- Produce a single comprehensive information book on all food hygiene regulations specifically for the local food sector.

### Provide finance for the local food sector

- Review downwards the minimum grant size in existing grant schemes to ensure that small, local enterprises can access funds. As an example the processing and marketing grant scheme has a lower limit of £70,000 and is therefore currently unavailable for some low cost small scale on farm processing and marketing operations.
- Provide new grants for capital costs, training and advisory services for the development of all links in the local supply chain from production to retail.

### Adapt trade policy to encourage local food

- Conduct a government policy review to assess the policy value of the international trade in food when compared to local food trade, including an assessment of the extent to which each delivers current agricultural objectives such as rural development, environmental protection and animal welfare.
- Undertake a review of agricultural trade policy and regulations with the aim of encouraging a major development of local and regional food economies. This would mean either the removal of agriculture from the World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules, or a negotiated amendment of the existing WTO regime in order to favour local and regional trade.

### Obtain the facts about local food

Research is needed on the current state of the local food sector and the barriers that exist to its growth, using the existing knowledge and experience gained by





### Local abattoirs

*The decline in local abattoirs severely restricts the availability of locally processed meat. Before the second world war there were more than 12,000 abattoirs in the UK. Now there are fewer than 380, of which currently only 67 have Soil Association certified organic processing facilities. The Soil Association is working to increase the number of local abattoirs and to improve access to existing facilities for organic livestock producers.*

local food projects (such as Devon Food Links) as a starting point. National data is required including:

- The size of the sector in each region.
- The available regional infrastructure (for example abattoirs and dairies).
- The number of people employed.
- Analysis of the main commodities, such as apples, traded in large amounts.
- In particular a study should be made of those products traded in and out of the country in similar amounts (for example poultry, pork, lamb, milk) to identify why they are not marketed more locally and the potential for regional trading links.
- Research to identify and quantify all the benefits of local food economies. For example, replication of the New Economics Foundation study of local food sector money flow in Cornwall in several regions of the UK to establish the extent to which the development of local food economies will support the sustainable development of the local economy.

The Soil Association's campaign 'eat organic, buy local' will ensure that action is taken to address these needs (see back cover).



### Food co-ops

*Local people group together to buy food in bulk from wholesalers or direct from local producers. Beanies, in Sheffield (above), was set up over ten years ago as a workers co-operative and are always seeking local suppliers for their organic fresh produce section.*

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# Other useful contacts

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**Farm Retail Association**  
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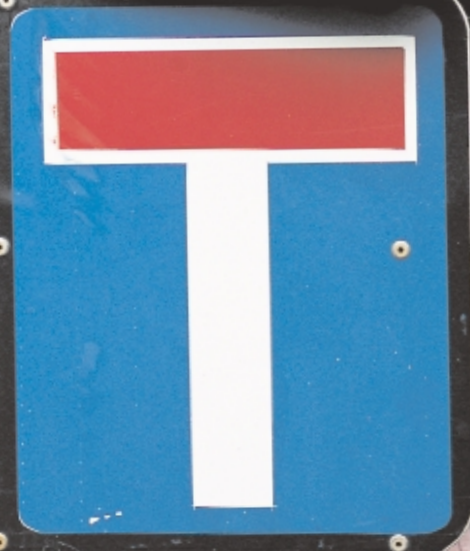
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**Womens Environmental Network**  
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## Local Food Routes

- Written by Jade Bashford, Joy Carey, Kirsty Righton, Gundula Meziani and Mark Luetchford. Edited by Mark Luetchford.

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# Eat organic, buy local

The success of the Food *futures* initiative relied on local people acting to support their local food economy. You too can play a part by joining the Soil Association's 'eat organic, buy local' campaign. For a free campaign pack telephone 0117 987 4562, visit [www.soilassociation.org](http://www.soilassociation.org) or write to the campaigns department at the Soil Association.

You can also vote with your shopping basket. The growing success of the local food sector means there are more and more opportunities to buy fresh, local, organic produce.

- Have a box of organic produce delivered to your door on a regular basis.
- Shop at your nearest farmers' market.
- Visit your local organic farm shop or independent retailer.
- Find out more about how organic food is produced by visiting one of the Soil Association's demonstration farms.
- Find your nearest organic local food outlets online at [www.soilassociation.org](http://www.soilassociation.org) or contact the Soil Association.

Take action today by joining the campaign for organic local food – 'eat organic, buy local.'



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