



HOW TO
STRENGTHEN
THE LOCAL FOOD
ECONOMY



Eating locally strengthens communities and creates vibrant town centres.

Eating local: Strengthening the local food economy

This guide is about developing local food networks and strengthening support for locally sourced food. It is for anyone wishing to set up or support a local food initiative in their area.

Benefits of eating more locally sourced food include:

- > Vast reduction in climate impacts
- > Reduction of food miles, using less fuel and reducing carbon footprint
- > Support of producers who keep farms at a humane scale and breeders who raise their livestock with care

Eating more locally sourced food has a multitude of benefits. A huge proportion of global greenhouse gas emissions come from the food system; shopping locally vastly reduces these climate impacts. Buying locally sourced food reduces food miles meaning less fuel is used in transportation, reducing its carbon footprint. Choosing local food helps support producers who keep their farms at a humane scale, breeders who raise their livestock with care, and farmers who respect the soil, countryside and biodiversity.

Building a network of independent local food producers increases their visibility and enables people to make healthy, sustainable choices about what they eat. It supports nearby businesses and creates local employment, and it keeps money circulating within the local economy. This helps strengthen communities and create distinctive, vibrant town centres.



Making a difference: Projects in action

Communities Living Sustainably (CLS) is a £12 million, five year programme funded by the Big Lottery Fund.

Twelve communities in England have received funding to help deal with the potential impact of climate change and build the sustainability and resilience of their local community, providing inspiration to other communities and sharing what they have learned.

Many of the projects developed initiatives celebrating local food, developing the local economy in their area.

» Sustainable Harborough



Sustainable Harborough set up the Market Harborough food and drink forum to bring together local producers and consumers. Following a successful open event, a steering group was formed comprising local businesses, producers and customers. The project has led two initiatives in particular: a local food and drink map and the edible16 online shopping service for the area.

“It encourages local businesses to start using each other - makes the community stronger.”
– Local Delicatessen owner

The map showcases local cafes, shops and restaurants as well as producers of food that is grown, reared and made in and around Harborough. It is available online, with paper copies available in the library and leisure centre as well as all participating retailers and local producer outlets. Businesses must be able to demonstrate sustainable practices in order to be included on the map. edible16 is an online click and collect shopping service for local food in the Market Harborough district. Food from local producers is advertised on the website and consumers place orders directly online. Produce is then either picked up by customers from a central location or delivered to them for a small fee.

Make it happen:

How can you do this in your own community?

>> Start with what's there

Offer a central point of coordination. There may already be lots of great retailers and producers in the area. By linking up varied stakeholders with a common interest, projects can establish and strengthen the local food networks that already exist.

>> Be creative

The maps produced for Bridport and Harborough are not just functional guides; they are also works of art. Producing an eye-catching product that shoppers will want to pick up and look through is half the battle. Work with local artists to capture what is distinctive about the area, and create something local businesses will want to represent them.

>> Look for unlikely allies

The Square Meal debate in Dorset brought together stakeholders with very different agendas: the National Farmers Union, the Landworkers' Alliance, the RSPB and Dorset Public Health to name just a few. Yet there was a surprising amount of common ground between them, and sharing a platform has opened dialogue between these different interests. It is only through getting everyone around a table and considering all angles that change can be made. Perseverance is key. It takes time to build relationships between organisations; give yourself plenty of time, and be patient if it doesn't happen straight away.

>> Get online

Setting up a website that brings together a range of local retailers increases their visibility and allows you to reach new audiences. More and more people are choosing to buy their groceries online and there is a real opportunity for local food here. Initiatives like the Food Assembly, where members order local food through an online market and then pick it up from the producers at a central location, are gaining momentum. They can help you set up something similar where you live.

>> Be part of a movement

Don't try to do it all by yourself – there are a number of national initiatives working on these issues that can offer support. The Sustainable Food Cities Network, the Food Assembly, the Square Meal Coalition and the Real Junk Food Project all provide ways to get in touch with like-minded people who can provide inspiration and support.

Help it happen:

How can you support local communities to bring about change?

Be an advocate

Local food producers and retailers have to overcome many challenges, and they need people on their side. Whatever your role in decision-making you can fly the flag for nutritious, ethical food that benefits the area. A sustainable food policy needs buy-in from the public sector, businesses and the community. Buying local may seem like a more expensive option, but it pays for itself: the local multiplier effect turns every £10 spent on locally produced food, independently retailed, into £17.60. *

Lead by example

Serving distinctive local produce at public events and corporate lunches gives independent retailers a huge boost – as well as making your events a talking point. Rethink those boring sandwiches and see what else is on the market. Lots of small producers offer catering at a reasonable cost and it gives you an opportunity to show that you put your values into practice.

Make your area a destination for food tourism

Food tourism is rapidly rising up the agenda, and this presents real opportunities to showcase the distinctive products of a town. Sustainable Harborough is supporting a new tourism website for Market Harborough, as well as organising walking events between independent restaurants. A small investment into promoting your local area as a hotspot for foodies can reap big rewards in bringing new people into town.

*CLS Dorset Food Evaluation, 2016

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