Report on the Food-Link, Meet the Producer's Event

The 11th November 2011 saw the coming together of producers and processors of local food together with potential buyers from the town’s retail trade. The evening provided an opportunity for Totnes retailers and restaurants to sample some of the amazing plethora of locally sourced food available. The exhibitors were requested to only provide samples of food where the predominant ingredient was sourced within a 30 mile radius of Totnes.

Of the 313 producers, growers, processors, retailers, hoteliers and restauranteurs invited, 38 organisations were represented by 51 attendees at the Meet the Produce event.

The aims of the evening was twofold:

1. To provide an update on some of the progress made since the launch event of the Food-Link project.
2. To allow the various components of the local food network to get together, and begin to forge working, business relations.

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Meet the Producer Agenda

- Introduction to Local Food in Totnes and the Food-Link project - Holly Tiffen – Food-Link Manager
- Farming for the Locals – John Sherrell – Great Prideaux Farm
- The Food Hub Project – John Crisp - Woodside Farm
- Meet the Producers – sample and network

Overview of the Key Agenda Items

Food-Link – Holly Tiffen – Food-Link Manager

Holly Tiffen is the Food-Link Manager at Transition Town Totnes. Holly explained that the Food-link project is funded through the National Lottery’s Local Food Fund and she is currently employed half time for a year, until the end of January 2012. The aim of the project is to link producers within a 30 mile radius of Totnes with their end-markets that are based in the town. The project will seek to work with all of the local food network to identify and work towards solutions to some of those challenges that have been identified for the sector in the recent CPRE report. There were 2 areas of potential project development that the audience were requested to show their support, or otherwise, for in connection with the challenge posed by a lack of clear labelling to help identify local processed and fresh foods. This had been explored at the previous event; the Launch of the Food-Link project, following this Holly has been to visit the successful Local to Ludlow branding project and she explained how it was envisaged that Totnes could have something similar – ‘Totally Totnes’! This would provide an easily recognised logo that could be used throughout the town to identify produce on shop shelves that is local; locally-sourced items sold in the markets; dishes on restaurant menus that contain a predominance of locally-sourced ingredients and accommodation providers that use locally-sourced breakfast ingredients. Linked to this Holly informed the audience that there were also plans for a Local Produce market, possibly to be held in the Rotherfold on a Saturday, to compliment the existing Saturday market based in the Civic Square. Producers will only be able to sell produce that is made from ingredients sourced predominantly within 30 miles of the town. The audience were invited to comment on the concept of a local food brand and a local produce market by writing their thoughts and contact details on to 2 flip chart sheets during the course of the evening. Information on the responses to these can be found under the Outcome section on page 4

Farming for the Locals - John Sherrell – Farmer

John Sherrell farms a 250 acre agricultural holding. John explained the value that he saw in gathering the different key suppliers of local food together and encouraged attendees of the Food-Link launch to use the opportunity to meet and chat in order to gain a better understanding of the role of other players in the room and to look at how collectively, we could work together more effectively in order to create an alternative food system based on local, quality food. What else did John say????
The Food Hub Project – John Crisp – Farmer

John Crisp has background info....

A team within the Transition Town Totnes Food Group have been responsible for drawing up a bid to the Local Food Fund to develop an online based Food Hub, this will provide a one stop shop for members of the public to purchase local produce from, the resulting orders will be delivered fortnightly to the Children's Centre next to St John's Primary School in Bridgetown for collection. John informed the audience that TTT has recently been awarded the funding and that the group were now seeking a number of producers and customers to work with them to further develop the project and to form the structure required for the co-operative. He also asked for a retailer to represent the town's shops, to help ensure that as much as possible, the concerns of the retailers were also taken in to consideration with any planning decisions. John is there anything else to add from what you said here?

Holly added that she hoped that the Food-Link project would be able to add to this project, for relatively little extra cost, by providing a wholesale arm to the Food Hub. This would enable restaurants and the retail sector to have direct access to a Totnes-based hub which producers and processors of local food would deliver to, the produce would then be distributed directly to the retailers. This would tackle some of the previously identified challenges to sourcing local food; specifically:

- Small Growers and Suppliers spend a lot of time distributing their produce at the expense of growing or producing food
- Retailers and restauranteurs interested in purchasing local food have limited time and resources to spend finding multiple small suppliers and dealing with the resulting number of separate invoices, having multiple customers is also a paper burden on farmers.

Meet the Producers – sample and network

Of the 61 people who booked to attend the Meet the Producers event 51 actually attended, representing 38 different businesses/groups. The breakdown of the business types were as follows:

- 1 wholesaler
- 5 Caterers
- 2 Community Sector
- 2 Dairy Farmers
- 1 Egg Farmer
- 3 Meat Farmers
- 9 Processors
- 6 Producers
- 4 Producers and Processors
- 1 Producer, Processor and Retailer
- 4 Retailers

This shows an overall balance of 17 businesses that are producers and 24 businesses that are purchasers of local produce, though it should be noted that some businesses do both. This made for a very balanced evening of those providing samples and those carrying out the sampling on behalf of their businesses.
Outcomes
Throughout the evening people were given the opportunity to respond to three ideas that were posed on flipchart paper and attendees were requested to write up their thoughts/responses to the ideas and indicate their support.

1. **If there was a brand to identify food sourced within 30 miles of Totnes would your business use it?**
   Twenty Six businesses recorded their support for this idea in principle, no specific issues or queries were raised. No one indicated any concerns or adversity to the idea.

2. **If Totnes had a Local Produce Market would your Business Supply Produce for it?**
   Seventeen businesses recorded their support for the concept of a market, assuming various conditions, such as affordability of the market stalls, no one indicated being against the concept.

3. **Do you want to be kept informed about the Food Hub?**
   Twenty four businesses indicated their interest in the Food Hub, a couple of retailers requested that the Food Hub work with them to ensure their interests are taken into account and local independent stores are not disadvantaged.

Feedback

- Participants were asked to rate their answers for questions one and two: where 10 is 100% positive, 5 is neutral and 1 is 100% negative.
- Questions three to eight were open questions*

Twenty six attendees filled in a feedback form at the end of the evening and the following responses were received:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>No. of responses</th>
<th>Average Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How valuable for your business did you find the talk on the Food Hub?</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How valuable for your business did you find the talk on branding local produce?</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Despite question three being an open question 11 people indicated “yes” and 10 indicated “possibly” in responses to: “do you feel that you will be able to source/sell more local food as a result of meeting people at this event?”

A synopsis of responses to the other questions can be seen below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. What other businesses would you have liked to have seen at this event?</td>
<td>More end markets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What would you like to be able to source locally that you currently can't?</td>
<td>Flour, pre-packed meat and cheese, organic fresh herbs, Porridge oats, hemp seeds and milk</td>
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<td>---</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. What would you have liked done differently at the event?</td>
<td>Attract a wider range of producers and end markets. Concentrate more on sharing resources, and local production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. What other events would you like the Food-Link project to host?</td>
<td>Host more of the same but later in the year when more produce is in season</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Other Comments</td>
<td>We would like to be involved in the Food Hub</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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