

## **CUMBRIA LOCAL AND FAIR**

### **Connecting local producers with local consumers**

*There is a high level of awareness of and commitment to Fairtrade in Cumbria, and for some shoppers, residents and visitors, a parallel commitment to local.*

#### **Headline question:**

***What must be done to increase the awareness and commitment of consumers in Cumbria, both residents and visitors, to buy local produce?***

#### **Context:**

Local produce in Cumbria has risen from a low base in the late 1990's to a significant force in the economy. Driven by popular TV, local campaigning and a need to respond to the Foot and Mouth crisis in a positive way for farmers, it is now expected as part of the food offer of the county. Some retailers have invested heavily, farmers markets have grown, farm shops and cafés abound, direct sellers have established themselves. Hotels and guest houses provide local products and it has become part of the distinctive tourism offer of the area.

Supermarkets have embraced the trend to a degree. The future is unclear however, as the recession continues to grip. Fully open 'traceability', clear labelling, and fair pricing are part of ensuring producers are not squeezed in these circumstances. Perhaps the time is right for a formal system to accredit local products and fix standards? What can consumers, farmers and retailers do together to help make this happen?

#### **Questions for discussion:**

This workshop aimed to answer the following questions in order to come up with solid proposals for action if the conclusions are positive:

**1. *Considering all aspects of the market, how do we 'rate' a) the availability and b) the visibility of local produce for consumers (residents and visitors) in Cumbria?***

A short session introduced the growth of local produce availability from a few early pioneers, Low Sizergh, Jim Hadwin, Peter Gott, Les Salisbury. To the boom that followed with investment after foot and mouth. Made in Cumbria, Cumbria Fells and Dales LEADER and Distinctly Cumbrian helped a lot of businesses get new products to market. TV chefs, locally like Annette Gibbons, John Crouch and Hugh F-W, Jamie, hairy bikers, two fat ladies etc nationally all have championed local. This has been taken up slowly by supermarkets, the Asda initiative led by John Geldard and Plumgarths food service has had a significant impact as has the likes of Westmorland Group, Cranstons and other speciality retailers in raising the profile. It was acknowledged that standards and traceability and price were all variable issues.

Pros and cons of buying local were discussed. All sorts of values are in / attributable to local food, social, cultural, environmental (through the habitat management and food miles / CO2 issues). The negatives include price, unclear messages, reliability of supply, reliability of access to produce.

**Other issues highlighted in discussion**

- a) Availability:
  - Too many brands and marks – it's confusing
- b) Visibility:
  - What is local, how do we know, what are the claims,

**2. What are the challenges to increasing a) the availability and b) the visibility of local produce for residents and visitors in Cumbria?**

Local producer, processor, farmer, marketer and farm shop owner, **Stewart Lambert** from Kitriding Farm near Kirkby Lonsdale illustrated how he had developed his business and some of the pitfalls and issues.

He highlighted customer care and customer confidence. He expounded qualities and standards, including taste issues (as opposed to the 'look' of food).

- Credibility /traceability are seen as key issues, the more traceability, the better the story, the more can be added in value, yet price is not limitlessly elastic. Trust and credibility keep customers returning, much easier to keep a customer than gain a new one. Reputation / word of mouth is still used as a key marketing tool.

**3. Having identified the challenges, what proposals can we make for the whole spectrum of retailers and distributors a) to raise the awareness of the Cumbrian public (residents and visitors) of the availability of local produce, and b) increase their commitment to buy it, and thus increase demand?**

a) Raise awareness

- Education, Education, Education.
  - More farm visits for schools – *Rob Greaves from CDEC will try and pull together existing resources to show the range available to assist with this. CDEC's capacity is challenged but they feel well placed to start this.*
  - A clear, traceable, credible mark – may not need to be just Cumbrian – *Refer to the Branding Group*
  - Cumbrian Breakfast – like branding only smaller initiatives that groupings/clusters of B+B's, hotels etc can trail - *hoteliers and B+B Assoc or Cumbria Tourist Board*
  - Making Cumbrian a choice – like Fair Trade – some Supermarkets have gone further e.g. Co-op with only a Fair Trade option on their tea and coffee.
  - Develop a trend like bags for life! – *Anna Waddilove from Nuture Eden! offered to pilot an initiative in Eden working with the Supermarkets.*
  - Produce a Cumbria listing of Local and Fair Trade producers. Possibly Web based. The primary audience would be visitors but locals would also benefit. - *Maria Whitehead from the LEP offered to take this forward with Made in Cumbria. Anna Waddilove offered support in the Eden area to trail an online listing.*
- Increase commitment
  - A Branding/quality control initiative, about Taste and texture rather than large scale and supply chains. Maybe need to look for a sponsor like Stobarts! – *Working with Made in Cumbria*

- Nurture pride in our locality – whichever locality we identify with and the things it produces – *Everyone at the event to be champions of local and Fair*
- Consumerism is urban led. We need to influence the urban consumer with a small number of quality products to develop consumer demand.

**4. *What will be needed from farmers, food manufacturers, statutory authorities and consumers to help them do this more effectively than is being done at present?***

- Analysis of where we are now and where we want to get too
- Stepping stones/Project planning for future products
- Greater involvement of the NFU/CLA and individual Farmers
- Better labelling from Supermarkets working with Fair and Local Groups
- Involvement of all the Fair trade and transition town groups as an information network for future development
- Very local initiatives that volunteers feel able to take on that fit the wider picture - like a local advertising leaflet that promotes the offer of a set of shops. The Farmers markets, individual producer and business links.
- Locally and in partnership with supermarkets promote the reasons why people should buy Local and Fair – support the local economy, maintain the environment, better quality, understanding provenance etc.
- Central distribution point!
- Another tranche (maybe the last) of funding is coming. Develop initiative that utilises the learning from past projects, starts small and includes people as it builds.
- Booths and the Co-operative are investigating setting minimum prices for milk with suppliers. Both were happy for this to be recorded as an action.

**5. *Who will take forward proposals coming from this workshop, how and over what time span?***

- People and organisation named in italics above.
- Steering group for the Fair trade and Local Event to continue drawing together disparate groups
- People who are prepared to cooperate
- ***Each role, from leadership, facilitation, campaigning, funding, primary production, processing, distribution, sales, all forms of direct selling and procurement must remain engaged and involved. We are stronger united.***

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**14.11.11**