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The Food Groups in Berks, Bucks, & MK and Oxfordshire work as a federation - BBO Food Groups - and are supported by the South East England Development Agency and by various local authorities and sponsors.



Eating local food in Thames Valley Schools

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Executive Summary

This report describes a project to trial locally sourced food in primary schools in the three counties of the Thames Valley; a project which was stimulated by workshop discussions at a conference held at Oxford Brookes University, in March 2004. The conference presented research on food procurement in the public sector, carried out for the federation of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes and Oxfordshire Food Groups (BBO Food Groups).

Oxfordshire County Facilities Management, catering for 216 schools, were keen to participate in the trial and identified a number of possible schools for the study. Buckinghamshire has no County catering facility and the food group coordinator wrote to all schools asking for a volunteer. Berkshire – divided into 6 unitary authorities – had no coordinating body and a number of schools were approached, before the decision to work with the contract caterers for West Berkshire was taken.

The trial took place in four schools, two of which were in West Berkshire, the other two in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. Suppliers were changed during the spring of 2005, starting in Oxfordshire in January. For Oxfordshire, monitoring of the trial covered food miles, take-up of school meals, food cost per meal, children's' views of food, supplier reliability, adequacy of administration – invoicing etc, quality of produce including food safety, appropriateness of produce, labelling (food safety), staffing costs and practicality in the context of kitchen facilities. For Buckinghamshire, an independent school took part and monitoring was adapted as appropriate, given that school meals were compulsory. For Berkshire, the food was only sourced and introduced for the last two weeks of the trial period and monitoring was sparse.

Parents in three schools were surveyed by questionnaire as to their views on the school meals, whether their children had noticed any difference during the trial, the value placed on local (or organic) food and what their shopping habits were. They were also asked whether they would pay more for local or organic food in school meals (except for the independent school, where meals are included in the fees).

There was a good response rate and a high level of interest in healthy eating for their children, though opinions varied as to children's needs. Coupled with a significant level of awareness of labels which describe "sustainable" foods, many parents said they would pay more for local or organic food in school meals.

The results of the trial at the school in Oxfordshire were spectacular, with a 20% **reduction** in the cost of food and 69% reduction in weekly food miles, even without taking into account the trips from the original source of the food

to the retailer, wholesaler or depot. The food was enjoyed by the children and the local economy benefited by up to £2,700 (based on a local multiplier of 1.76). There were many other benefits which are described in the main body of the report and the case study.

Likewise, for Buckinghamshire, the school saved money by purchasing local meat and the food was enjoyed by children and staff. Because of the constraints of the kitchen, it proved impossible to source (pre-prepared) vegetables locally. The parents were pleased to be involved with the initiative and the school's owners have been approached with a proposal to invest in kitchen equipment which will allow for the preparation of more fresh, unprocessed food.

Both schools held a healthy eating week where activities revolved around healthy and local food, food miles and other issues such as fair trade. Both schools are continuing with the new local suppliers for as much produce as possible.

The schools in Berkshire received locally sourced food for two weeks only, which did not allow time to hold a promotional week. The caterers decided not to continue with the supplies on the basis that they were too expensive.

1. Introduction

This project was stimulated by the outcome of a conference – “Good Food on the Public Plate” – held to present the results of research into local public sector food procurement, on behalf of the BBO Food Groups and funded by Food from Britain and Oxford Brookes University Business School. At the conference, the delegate from Oxfordshire County Facilities Management (CFM) was approached by delegates from schools who wanted to improve their meals through the Public Sector Food Procurement Initiative and were keen to work with CFM to try and do this. CFM had already worked with a secondary school in Oxfordshire to try out new recipes made from locally sourced meat, with mixed results.

Although CFM were keen to expand their exploratory work, some funding was needed to help identify suppliers and monitor the project, as well as to extend the trial throughout the three counties covered by BBO Food Groups. The Centre for Environmental Studies in the Hospitality Industry (CESHI) at Oxford Brookes Business School worked with BBO Food Groups to manage the project and publish the research findings.

2. Aims and Objectives

- 2.1. The project was designed to achieve progress against the five priority objectives for the PSFPI by:

- inviting small local businesses to compete to supply food to schools in three counties
 - improving the quality of the food offered to children
 - assessing the reduction in environmental impacts by using a more local supply chain
 - monitoring health and safety for the production and processing of the local food, reporting back and assisting with training if necessary
 - publishing identified market opportunities to increase supply in order to meet demand from schools and others.
- 2.2. The aim was to achieve practical outcomes by enabling a greater number of local producers to supply public sector purchasers in future, having been certified in terms of health and safety and given access to supplier lists. A directory of the suppliers will be published and widely disseminated, allowing other purchasers access to the local products. Information on supply shortages and market opportunities will also be widely circulated through the BBO Food Groups.
- 2.3. The project findings (willingness/ability of local producers to supply the public sector, production/processing standards, identified supply shortages, uptake of meals by school pupils, satisfaction with meals, environmental impacts of local supply chain) are to be published widely to enable the model to be replicated elsewhere.

3. Methodology

3.1. Identifying pilot schools

Many primary schools in Oxfordshire no longer have their own kitchen facilities and so this was a key consideration for selection. CFM met with a number of schools in Oxfordshire and selected a primary school – South Moreton School, near Didcot - where governors had already demonstrated a commitment to healthy eating and local food and were in the early stages of developing a Whole School Food Policy.

In Buckinghamshire, the county ceased offering meal services to schools over ten years ago and most primary schools do not have their own kitchens. The food group coordinator wrote to schools to attract interest and received replies from four, two of which are independent. After telephone discussions, the two independent schools were visited and assessed as participants. The other two schools were unable to take part for different reasons.

One of the schools visited was already sourcing much of its food locally and all meat from an organic butcher. It was felt that there might be little scope for improvement. The other one, Ladymede Preparatory School, near Aylesbury, had a recently appointed head and catering manager and was very keen to participate, building on recent changes to the menus to reduce the amount of processed food being served.

For Berkshire, food group contacts provided some suggestions for schools in Reading, where all primary schools have meals provided by Initial Catering, a private contractor. After exhaustive efforts to contact the schools, only one discussion took place and it was evident that there was no scope at the time for the school to “opt out” or to work with the caterer. Likewise, for Bracknell, discussions with a primary and secondary school, both with private caterers, came to nothing. Finally, Hampshire County Council Catering services (HC3S), who provide school meals in West Berkshire, were approached and agreed to participate. They identified two schools, in Newbury and in Thatcham, to take part in the pilot – two were chosen in order to maximize the chance of producing three case studies for the project.

3.2. Formation of Steering Group

This was convened to include the lead Director from GOSE, BBO Food Groups manager/coordinator from Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, the CESH project manager and representatives from the caterers and pilot Schools. The purpose of the group was to help plan the project, in particular the educational aspects, and to exchange information so that each pilot school could learn from the others. The Oxfordshire Schools Sustainability Officer attended the meetings whenever possible and liaised with the Healthy Schools Project Officer. A representative from the Primary Care Trust in Buckinghamshire was invited to join, but could not attend the first meeting and after further discussion, did not in the end join the group. A list of Steering Group members is at Annex 1a and the responsibilities for project tasks are set out at Annex 1b.

3.3. Identifying local suppliers

BBO Food Groups drew up a list of members who are known to wholesale their produce and who were considered to supply the type of foods required by schools. Letters were sent initially to 58 Food Groups members and 6 non-members, asking them to opt out if they did not want to have their details included in a Directory for School Caterers. Only 1 member and 1 non-member declined. In the meantime, CFM had identified some local suppliers themselves and

begun discussions with a local butcher and a farm shop, both within a few miles of South Moreton School.

To assist the school caterers taking part in the project, a database was constructed, divided into County and food commodity type. 56 producers and suppliers were listed, many of whom offered more than one type of food commodity.

The Catering Manager at Ladymede School used the database to identify a butcher which claims to supply meats from within 25 miles of the shop in Buckinghamshire.

Later in the course of the project, letters were sent to 870 NFU members in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes and Oxfordshire, enclosing a questionnaire on their produce, any certifications and delivery capability (attached as Annex 2). 35 replies were received from farmers, of which 22 were willing to be included in the Directory.

3.4. Menu analysis

The caterers were asked to examine their menus for ingredients which could be sourced locally. Both were supplied with the food producer database described in 3.3. These two county-based catering organizations operate largely with standard menus throughout Oxfordshire (CFM) and West Berkshire (HC3S), based on the current Government Nutritional Standard and, for HC3S, the menus meet the Caroline Walker Trust guidelines. Both companies have a policy of minimizing the amount of processed food served in school meals. Primary school menus for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire are included at Annexes 3a and 3b and Annex 3c gives more details about the food provided by HC3S.

During preliminary discussions with CFM, the governors of South Moreton School had decided that the menu need not be changed for the trial. The week one menu for South Moreton School at Annex 3d highlights those items which can be locally sourced in winter time. Analysis of the three week rotating menu indicates that about 40% of the dishes contain locally sourced meat or local seasonal vegetables.

Ladymede School in Buckinghamshire had redesigned the menus relatively recently as there had been a high proportion of processed foods. Menus are based on traditional home cooking, with processed foods, e.g. fish fingers, once a week, on Fridays and an example is at Annex 3e. The main constraint for the catering manager is the type of kitchen equipment, which does not allow for the preparation and cooking of fresh vegetables in the time available. Examples of

frozen/pre-prepared vegetables used include potatoes, carrots, sweetcorn, broccoli, cauliflower and sprouts.

The catering manager identified a local butcher herself, using the supplier database and changed over early in the spring. The food group coordinators for Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes then visited the school and discussed other items which might be available locally, from which they prepared a target list of suppliers (Annex 3f).

For comparison with the menus from the three schools, key findings from the Sodexo national "School Meals and Lifestyle Survey" are presented at Annex 3g.

3.5. Health and Safety issues

CFM carried out an inspection and audit for the two suppliers they had identified (butcher and farm shop). The Supplier Evaluation Report used covered the following:

- Company Policies
- Factory Conditions – External
- Factory Conditions – Internal
- Field Operations
- Factory Controls & Procedures
- Quality Assurance
- Hygiene/Cleaning/Housekeeping
- Personnel
- Laboratory
- Product Development
- Staff Amenities
- Pest Control

Both suppliers were deemed acceptable however both needed a follow up visit to monitor recommended improvements.

For Ladymede School, the owners require a recognized certification for all suppliers of high risk foods, in this case the BRC (British Retail Consortium) standard.

HC3S used information provided by the Environmental Health Officer in Newbury to monitor the suppliers' premises. Both suppliers were able to comply with Hampshire County Council's requirement for public liability cover of £10 million. The normal supplier inspection by HCC Scientific Services, involving microbial testing, was foregone

because of the cost, which could not be justified for a pilot project of this nature.

3.6. Market Research

The Steering Group discussed the proposal to survey parents and ascertain their views on the meals which were provided, both before and during the trial. This also presented an opportunity to assess the value placed by parents upon various types of “sustainable” food, in particular local and organic food. A questionnaire survey was designed and distributed to all four schools (see Annex 4). This type of survey has limitations because the sample is self selecting, being by definition those parents who are concerned enough about their children’s diet to respond.

South Moreton School had carried out a school meals survey some 18 months previously, therefore the first question enables comparison with the previous results.

West Berkshire Council carried out a school meals survey prior to 2004 and asked how much parents would be prepared to pay. The results from another, more recent, unitary authority survey in Berkshire were also made available by the Council.

Key findings from the Sodexo national “School Meals and Lifestyle Survey” are presented at Annex 3f.

3.7. Raising Awareness

Previous projects have illustrated the value of taking a “whole school approach” and of introducing the concept of healthy eating into the curriculum, alongside other information on food provenance, food miles and fair trade. The schools in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire agreed to resource healthy food weeks in March and April respectively, during which teachers and visiting speakers worked with children on the topics mentioned. In planning these events, the schools were supported by the local food groups coordinators, the Oxfordshire Schools Sustainability Officer and Healthy School Coordinator, the Rural Education Initiative, Farming and Countryside Education, and the Northmoor Trust. Lists of resources for schools from the Soil Association and others were prepared and supplied to Ladymede School.

The schools in West Berkshire were asked what resources they would like (see Annex 5), however it was not possible to plan for similar awareness raising events as the local food was not introduced into school meals until two weeks before the end of the project.

3.8. Monitoring

In addition to the parent satisfaction survey, CFM agreed to monitor a wide variety of parameters as follows:

- take-up of school meals, compared with previous term
- food cost per meal
- amount of waste and cost of waste
- children's views of food (through waste monitoring and by asking them)
- supplier reliability
- adequacy of administration – invoicing etc
- quality of produce including food safety
- appropriateness of produce
- labelling (food safety)
- staffing costs
- practicality in context of kitchen facilities

Monitoring at Ladymede School was necessarily scaled down and some of the above measures were not appropriate, since school lunches are compulsory. Parent representatives for each form were invited into school one day to have lunch and discuss the meal provision. The BBO Food Groups Manager attended and made a presentation on the project to parents.

For West Berkshire, food cost was monitored, meal takeup was recorded and children's feedback sought.

4. Results

4.1. School profiles

These are presented in Table 1 which follows.

Table 1 – Profile of four pilot schools in Thames Valley

School	No. of pupils/ age range	Caterer/ Catering arrangements	National Initiatives	Local Initiatives	Constraints	Objectives
South Moreton School, Didcot, Oxfordshire	131 pupils aged 5 to 11	CFM Lunches cooked on site by two CFM staff. "Fun Food Fridays". Meal uptake 41%. Food cost £0.56 per head (pre-trial)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eco School – working towards Green Flag • Fruit for Schools (for 5 to 7 years) • Developing School Food Policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy tuck shop • Sensory garden, including vegetables • Survey of parents' views of school meals in 2003 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited storage space in kitchen • No meat fridge 	To move away from standard County-wide menus
Ladymede Preparatory School, Little Kimble, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire	114 pupils, aged 3 to 11	Own Manager plus two assistants (1 p/t) Lunches compulsory (no lunchboxes); some children have breakfast and tea. Processed foods used on Fridays. Food cost £0.65 per head (pre-trial)		No sweets, cakes, biscuits or crisps can be brought into school, only fruit	Only frozen/ pre-prepared vegetables used because of time required to prepare and cook fresh ones	Upgrade kitchen with combi oven to permit faster cooking

School	No. of pupils/ age range	Caterer/ Catering arrangements	National Initiatives	Local Initiatives	Constraints	Objectives
Whitelands Park Primary School, Thatcham, Berkshire	340 pupils, aged 4-11	HC3S - meals cooked on site by HC3S staff. Chips on Fridays. Meal uptake 30% to 34% (Fridays).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eco School • Healthy Schools Bronze Award • Fruit for Schools 	Small allotment on site, run as gardening club		
St Nicholas Church of England Junior School, Newbury, Berkshire	250 pupils, aged 7 to 11	HC3S - meals cooked on site by HC3S staff. Chips on Fridays. Meal uptake 36% to 48% (Fridays).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy Schools Gold Award • Food Standards agency case study on lunchboxes 	School Nutrition Action Group	Limited dining area	

4.2. Supplier database

Table 2 summarizes the profile of suppliers of local food in the three counties, categorized by county and by food commodity supplied.

Table 2 – database of local food suppliers			
Commodity type	Meat	Fruit & Veg	Eggs, Dairy, Bread
N.B. many suppliers offer more than one commodity group	33	20	21
County	Berkshire	Oxfordshire	Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes
	13	17	26

The 56 suppliers shown will be included in the Directory for School Caterers, alongside 22 NFU members who responded to a survey carried out later in the project. When contacting Buckinghamshire- and Milton Keynes-based suppliers for specific ingredients identified by Ladymede School, the coordinator found that most were unwilling to deliver small quantities to one school. This is a universal problem (identified in numerous projects including Kay Knight's work in South Gloucestershire¹), one possible solution being to set up a distribution hub for local produce, based on the model provided by organic food box schemes.

HC3S procurement staff were unable to identify a West Berkshire based supplier for fruit and vegetables, and HC3S eventually settled on Sheepdrove Farm for meat and Prosperous Home Farm for yoghurt. Other producers had no stock (fruit), could not meet the delivery requirements, were too far away from Newbury to justify the trip for a small quantity, or could not meet Hampshire County Council procurement department's public liability insurance specification. The two producers who were selected are both very well geared up to supply caterers, with adequate health and safety accreditation and, in the case of Sheepdrove Farm, a price list for schools.

4.3. Health and Safety

The results of the audits carried out by CFM on the two selected Oxfordshire suppliers were satisfactory, subject to follow-up visits for each. As with previous projects involving SME food producers supplying catering operations (for example Compass and Oxford

¹ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/sustain/procurement/casestudies/sgs.htm>

Brookes – see

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/sustain/procurement/casestudies/compass.htm>), the auditor must take a pragmatic approach and

recognize that small companies do not have the resources to achieve top marks in all sections of the audit. Although the detailed results must remain confidential, in summary, both suppliers achieved “Acceptable” ratings on average, with particular areas of concern being policies on complaints and HACCP and environmental policies. Traceability records, COSHH information, Food Hygiene certificates and protective clothing for staff, and cleaning schedules were also highlighted. Often, it is a case of failing to keep records to demonstrate that correct procedures are being followed.

For Ladymede School, The local butcher was able to supply evidence of BRC certification and to demonstrate full traceability.

Newbury Environmental Health Service gave both selected suppliers a clean bill of health on standards and HACCP.

4.4. Market Research

Parent surveys were carried out at three schools, using a simple questionnaire, included at Annex 4. The results are summarized in Tables 3 to 6 and Figures 1 to 5.

Selection of comments made by parents of children at South Moreton, Ladymede and St Nicolas C of E Schools

“Generally the meals are good, but children will often opt for unhealthy choices if they are available. There are too many processed foods on the menu.”

“Child has commented on the improvement of school dinners since the menu has changed.”

“The Friday menu is generally not food I would allow my children to consume unless under extraordinary circumstances, i.e. a birthday party. Could we not replace smiley potato faces with a fresh vegetable?”

“Lots of meals duplicate starch e.g. pizza and beans.”

“I am glad to see the ready-made foods such as twizzlers, chicken nuggets etc are removed from the menu.”

“I feel the meals are well planned and varied. I would not expect a totally organic diet to be provided as I don't do so myself, but think a balance is necessary to entice children to eat - "a little of what you fancy does you good". I do not think Jamie Oliver needs to visit!!”

Many parents made detailed comments and a strong message came through these, namely that most parents did not want to see processed foods in their children's meals and did not see a need for a

“junk food” day once a week, whilst recognizing that such foods have a role as treats at children’s parties. A plea from some for “simple, home cooked, traditional dishes – meat and two vegetables” does not recognize the constraints of catering for a wide range of likes and dislikes, allergies and intolerances and different ethnicities, but the point about simply cooked foods is well made and many caterers are recognizing that eliminating most processed foods and banning most additives is the way forward in school catering.

South Moreton	Ladymede	St Nicolas	Whitelands Park
22% (30)	40% (46)	22% (55)	Not distributed

4.4.1. Overall view of school lunches

There was considerable variation of opinion on whether the school lunches provided were healthy, adequate in terms of nutrition and contributed to a balanced diet. Pupils at Ladymede have no opportunity to opt out of school lunch as lunchboxes are not permitted. The food cost per meal at this school is £0.65, compared with £0.56 for South Moreton (before the trial began – food costs reduced as a result of local purchasing). Food cost per meal at St Nicolas is £0.42.

	% who had seen menu	% who thought that meals were:		
		Nutritious	Healthy	Balanced
Ladymede	78	76	74	78
St Nicolas	69	40	38	42
S Moreton	87	53	53	50
S Moreton (previous survey)		35	25	29

Menus are included at Annex 3. All three school caterers make a point of advertising that most of the food is home-made, all food is cooked on site and all three schools have a “Fun Food Friday”, on which day a variety of processed foods and chips make an appearance. This seems to be a bone of contention for many responding parents, though no conclusions can be drawn about the majority who did not respond to the survey.

For comparison, the results from the 2004 primary school parent survey in a Berkshire unitary authority (437 respondents) indicated that 82% felt that the menu was

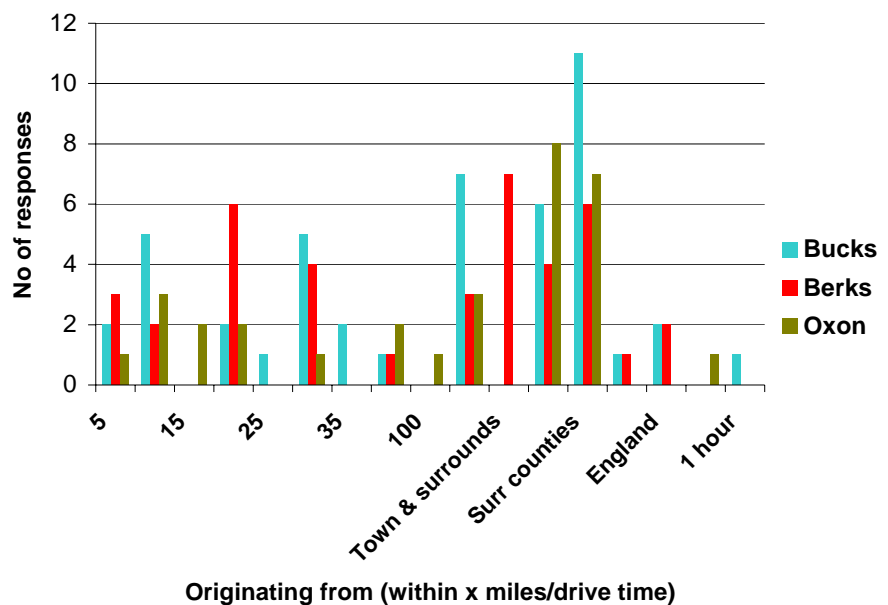
either acceptable or good and the improvements most wanted were:

- More fresh ingredients (93%)
- Less processed food (84%)

4.4.2. What does “Local” mean

There was a wide range of views on what local means in the context of buying food, with most responses clustering around 10 to 30 miles, the county and surrounding counties.

Figure 1 – what “local” means when purchasing food



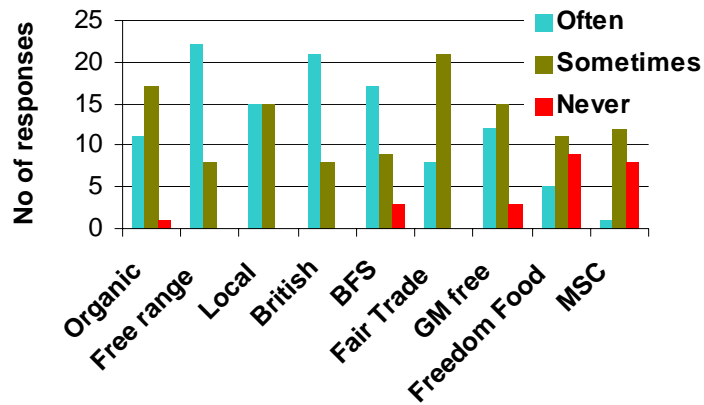
4.4.3. Purchasing of “Sustainable” foods

Parent respondents’ purchasing behaviour was measured by the frequency with which they purchased foods bearing a variety of different labels.

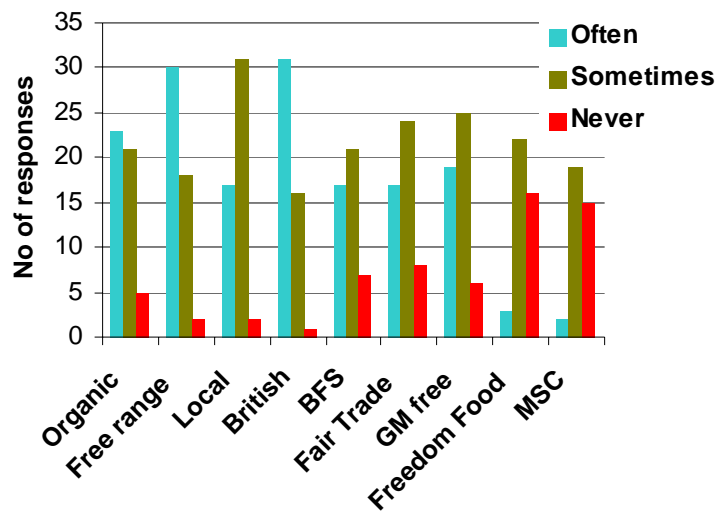
- Key:**
- British** Food labelled as produced in Britain
 - BFS** British Farm Standard (little red tractor)
 - MSC (fish)** Marine Stewardship Council certified

Figure 2 – Parents purchasing behaviour

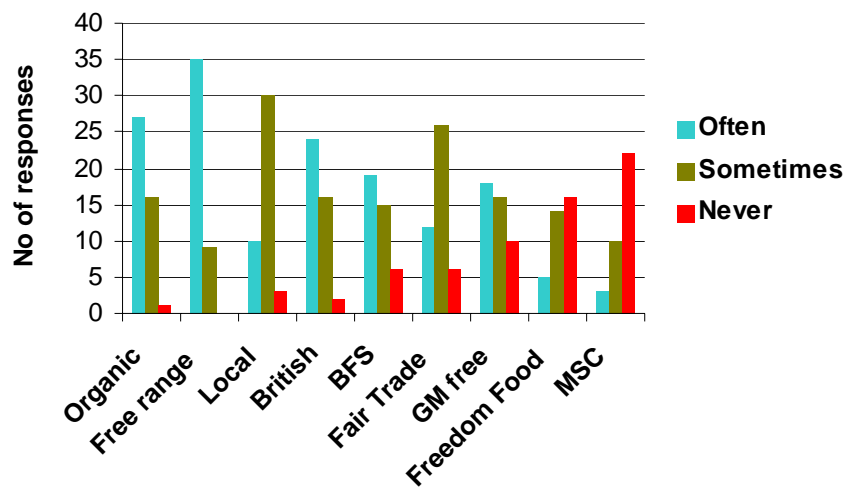
2a - South Moreton School



2b - St Nicolas School



2c - Ladymede School

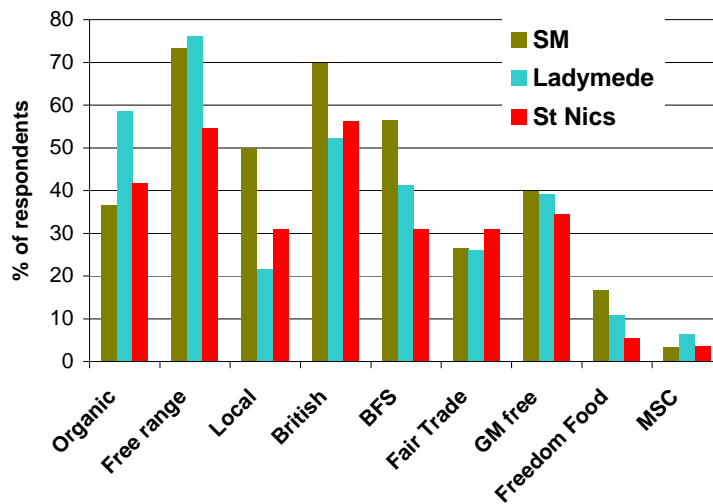


Accredited foods which were often purchased, either because they were familiar or because parents valued the

accreditation highly, were “free range” and British (labelled as being of British origin). 59% of respondents from parents of Ladymede pupils stated that they often bought organic foods.

British, British Farm Standard (little red tractor) and local foods were purchased significantly more by parents with children at South Moreton school, situated in a rural area with a thriving local food culture.

Figure 3 – Foods which were purchased “often”



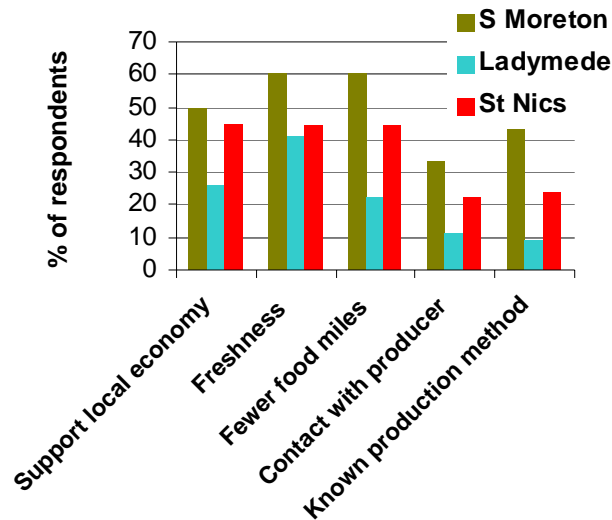
	S Moreton (1)	Ladymede (2)	St Nicolas (3)
Organic	37%	59%	42%
Free range	73%	76%	55%
Local	50%	22%	31%
British	70%	52%	56%
BFS	57%	41%	31%

- (1) Rural area, agricultural community, including intake from Didcot.
- (2) Independent (fee paying) school in semi-urbanized area near Aylesbury.
- (3) Middle of market town with mixed catchment area.

Figure 4 shows the proportion of respondents who said that the reasons given in the questionnaire for buying local food were very important. Freshness (not always the case), reducing food miles and supporting the local

economy were the most favoured. The higher proportion of respondents from the South Moreton parents reflects the higher proportion of them who buy local food (see Table 5 above).

Figure 4 – reasons for buying local food

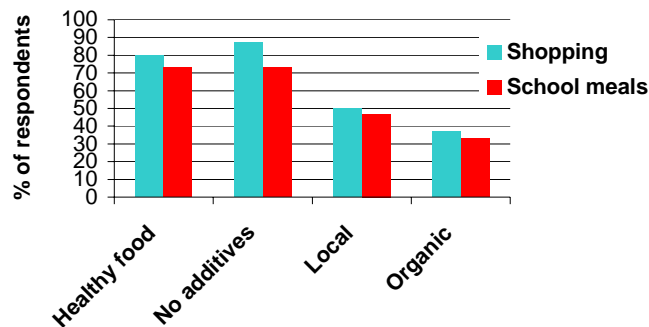


4.4.4. The importance of sustainable food in school meals and when shopping

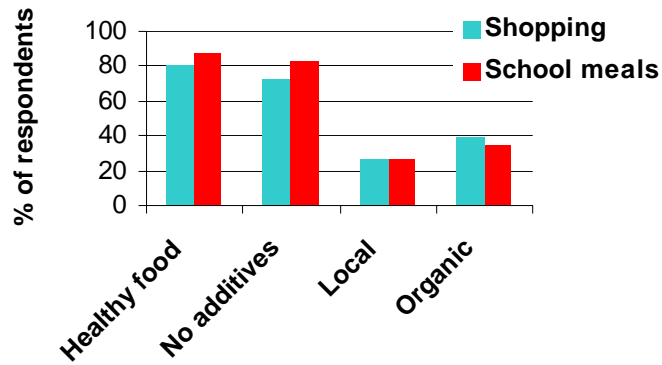
The survey asked parents how important it was that the food they bought for their families and the food used in school meals met four attributes: that it was healthy (low in fat, salt and sugar), that it had no additives, that it was produced locally or that it was organic. Figure 5 shows the proportion of respondents who rated these attributes as important or very important.

Figure 5 – Proportion of respondents judging food attributes to be important/very important

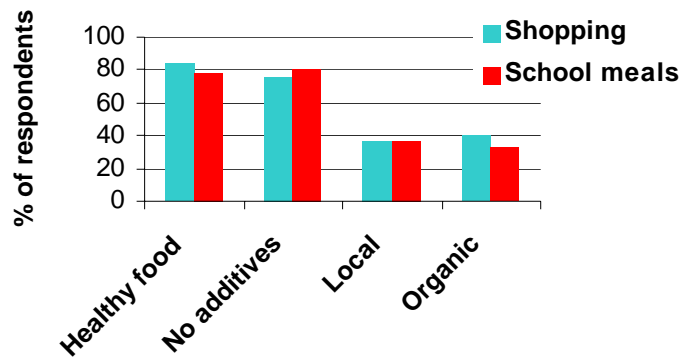
5a – South Moreton



5b – Ladymede



5c – St Nicolas



There is very little difference in the results from the three sets of respondents except for a greater prominence (around 50% saying it was (very)/important) given to Local Food by the parents of children at South Moreton School, reflecting the earlier results (Table 5 and Figure 3).

4.4.5. Willingness to pay

This question was only asked of the two schools (South Moreton and St Nicolas) where meals were provided by "County" caterers. Meals at Ladymede are included in school fees and are compulsory in any case. Willingness to pay surveys are controversial in that respondents will often say that they will pay more, but do not follow this up in practice. However, the results do give an indication of the relative value placed by respondents on local or organic foods in the context of school meals.

Table 6 shows the overall picture.

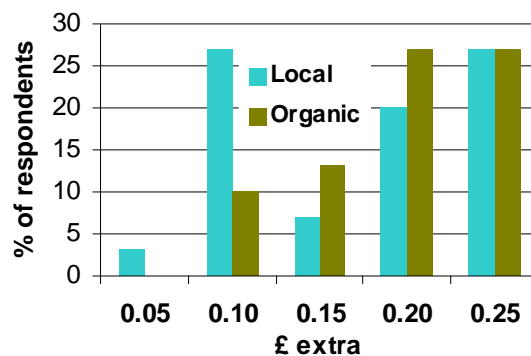
	South Moreton		St Nicolas	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Local (from BBO)	83%	13%	76%	24%
Organic	77%	20%	69%	27%

N.B. Percentages do not add to 100 as some people did not answer.

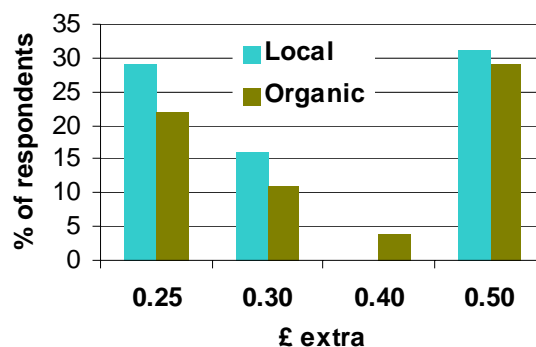
Figure 6 shows the distribution of what parents said they were prepared to pay (the maximum price), for each school. The current price of lunches at South Moreton is £1.55, and £1.50 at St Nicolas.

Figure 6 – Amount parents prepared to pay extra for Local/Organic food in school lunches

5a – South Moreton



5b – St Nicolas



These figures illustrate that at South Moreton School, local food would not command such a high premium as organic food, whereas at St Nicolas, local food is slightly more valued than organic food, by contrast with earlier results.

For South Moreton, 24 respondents (80%) said they would pay *at least* 10p more for meals containing local food, and 23 (77%) said this for organic food. 8 (27%) said they would pay up to 25p more for both local and organic food (separate attributes).

For St Nicolas, for which the survey question was designed slightly differently, 42 respondents (76%) said they would pay *at least* 25p more for meals containing local food, and 36 (65%) said this for organic food. 17 (31%) said they would pay up to 50p more for local and 16 (29%) for organic food (separate attributes).

West Berkshire Council's survey had shown that parents are prepared to pay more to get quality and the conclusion was that the price of school meals could be increased to £2 if the quality improved significantly.

4.5. Raising Awareness

4.5.1. Healthy Eating Week at South Moreton School

South Moreton School in Oxfordshire held a "Healthy Eating week" from 7 to 11 March 2005. During this week a number of external visitors, together with the teachers, worked with all of the classes on the following topics:

Foundation Class: naming fruit and vegetables, discussing why they are important. Printing with fruit and vegetables

Class 1: healthy eating – what food is healthy? Art, painting fruit and vegetables. Healthy lunch boxes with Annie Cousins. Composting.

Class 2: Healthy lunch boxes with Annie Cousins. Recycling.

Class 3: Seasonal fruit and vegetables. Which part of fruit and vegetables do we eat? Working with Hayley Grey.

Class 4: How far does our food for our school dinners travel? Map work. How does getting food from local sources affect our environment?

Class 5: Fair Trade with Ruth Booker.

Each class put together a display which was exhibited in the hall, alongside a display from the Old Farm Shop, the supplier of fruit and vegetables.

On Friday afternoon, parents were invited to attend the exhibition to view the children's work and taste the locally produced food. A dietician was at the exhibition to answer parents' questions.

The children enjoyed these activities and the sense of purpose generated by their work. The exhibition was well attended and deemed successful. The Eco School coordinator felt that the whole week was a really worthwhile exercise and has heard from parents that the children are discussing healthy eating issues at home.

Parents' comments at the event were confined to appreciation of the children's work and the food tasting. Their views on the school meals are summarized in 4.4 on page 13.

An accident of timing, whereby the healthy eating week coincided with a very high profile television programme, meant that the Press Release (Annex 6) attracted a great deal of press coverage as follows:

- The Courier newspaper
- The Wallingford and Didcot local paper
- Passion Radio
- Radio Oxford
- Fox FM Radio
- Central News (30th March)
- ITV National News (30th March)

4.5.2. Food Week at Ladymede School

The school organized this to start on Monday 25 April. The programme was as follows:

Monday:

Whole school assembly – matching food items with country of origin

Class III – a balanced meal/fruit and vegetable alphabet

Class IV – an adverb Food diary

Class VI - 5 a day fruit and vegetables; healthy and unhealthy diets – an art activity

Nursery – eating bread



Left and above: exhibition and food tasting at South Moreton School on 11 March 2005

Right: Murray Graham, parent and local farmer, talks to lower school assembly at Ladymede School on 28 April 2005.



Tuesday:

Classes IIP and IIM – A to Z of fruit and vegetables

Wednesday:

Class I – Plants as food

Thursday:

Lower School Assembly – talk by parent farmer, Murray Graham, about food production, from seed to crop to table and animal to table

Friday:

Class V – Advertising – a study of television adverts

The school received local press coverage (Buckinghamshire Herald 4 May 2005) and hopes to publish an article in the Primary Times in the autumn term (2005).

- 4.5.3. As indicated previously, there was no time to organize a healthy food week at either school in Newbury and Thatcham.

4.6. Monitoring**4.6.1. South Moreton School, Oxfordshire**

The new food supplies were brought in from 10 January 2005 and monitoring results are for the two (six week) spring terms. County facilities management staff reported that:

- Compared with the previous term, take-up of school meals increased by 17%, from 41% of pupil roll to 48%, representing 10 to 15 more children each week;
- Food costs per meal have reduced by 20%, from £0.56 to £0.45 per head and are now £0.05 lower than the average for the County;
- Thrice weekly delivery of fresh meat means that quantities required each day can be estimated more accurately and there is less wastage;
- Children have commented that the food tastes nicer, with the exception of one who preferred the sausages which were served before the trial;
- The catering team were pleased with the quality of the products and the increased flexibility of deliveries;

- The flexibility in deliveries and no minimum drop value has been a factor in managing food costs better;
- Staffing costs remained the same reflecting the fact that the school has a skilled catering team of two in place;
- The suppliers have proved reliable and there have been no problems with administration or invoicing.

A benefit which may not have been anticipated is the enthusiasm of the staff responsible for food purchasing and supplier audits. Identification of new local suppliers and discussions about product development have added greatly to job satisfaction.

The local economy has benefited directly by £1535, which, according to a recent study², may be worth as much as £2,700 to the local economy, when the suppliers' own local spending is taken into account.

Weekly food miles have been reduced by 69% from 148 to 46, taking into account return trips from the farm shop and butcher, replacing the previous trips from the wholesaler and distribution company. Meats supplied by the butcher came from Oxfordshire and Wiltshire and seasonal fruit and vegetables were grown locally, apart from the lettuce (from Leicestershire). The origin of supplies which previously came from the wholesalers is not easily traceable.

Comments from the survey of parents are below.

If you or your child has noticed any improvements in the meals since we last carried out this survey, can you say what they are?

"Child comments that food tastes better. I am not now aware of food running out."

"Better quality food and increased quantities."

"Child has commented on the improvement of school dinners since the menu has changed."

"No. Still doesn't really like them."

"My daughter (7) says the sausages are nicer."

"I am glad to see the ready-made foods such as twizzlers, chicken nuggets etc are removed from the menu."

² BUYING LOCAL WORTH 400 PER CENT MORE -

http://www.neweconomics.org/gen/news_buyinglocalworth400percentmore.aspx

The results of the HACCP audits are reported in 4.3 on page 12.

The success of the trial has encouraged CFM to roll out local food sourcing incrementally across the county, responding to demand from schools which have the facilities to implement this, i.e. on-site kitchens and catering staff. Four new meat suppliers have been assessed to supply six schools around the County, some starting in the summer of 2005 and some in the autumn term.

4.6.2. Ladymede School, Buckinghamshire

On 8th March, eight parent form reps ate lunch with the pupils, received a presentation from the BBO Food Groups Manager and talked to the catering manager. Home made lasagne made with local beef and onions, served with carrots and green beans, was reported to be tasty and healthy. The current use of reconstituted mashed potato was discussed and the parents heard that the school had asked its owners to invest in a combination oven, which would cook potatoes in 10 minutes. The "Friends of Ladymede" hope to buy a rumbler to peel potatoes.

The event is pictured below.



The total spend on local foods during the trial was £2,114. The aforementioned study by the New Economics Foundation and Northumberland County Council found that every pound spent with a local supplier is worth £1.76 to the local economy, whereas it is worth only £0.36 if spent out of the area. Both the first tier suppliers now used by the school are local and the evidence which suggests that they are likely to re-spend, on average, £0.76 per £1 of their income in the local area, is generally supported by the findings which follow.

Having selected a new local supplier for meat and eggs (9 miles from the school), the origin of the foods was investigated. Organic beef was supplied via another butcher, less than 10 miles away, though it would have travelled via the first tier supplier (4.3 miles) and on to the school (9 miles). Poultry came from Norfolk (112 miles plus 9 miles), and lamb was sourced from within 30 miles of the primary (first tier) supplier. Eggs came from a farm in Buckinghamshire.

After discussions with staff, the catering manager decided to go back to her old supplier (3.5 miles from the school) for lamb as it was cheaper and of better quality. This was sourced through an intermediary company in Witney, Oxfordshire but its provenance is not known, other than it is British.

It would theoretically be possible to trace the exact origin of the foods but has not been possible within the constraints of this project. A meaningful calculation of food miles could only be made if the farm of origin was traced for each type of meat and although attempts have been made through the internet, this would have to be followed through by enquiries with the first tier suppliers.

This case study illustrates the complexity of the food chain, particularly for meat, which travels from farm to slaughter, back to farm or on to processor, then to wholesale and/or catering butcher and on to the retailer. It also shows that "local" supply of meat is a movable feast and that origin needs to be carefully checked with the butcher.

4.6.3. St Nicolas C of E School, Newbury and Whitelands Park School, Thatcham

Meal take-up increased by 10%, from 120 to 132 per day, at Whitelands Park and decreased by 9%, from 80 to 73 per day at St Nicolas. HC3S reported a lot of focus on why some of the food was changing at Whitelands Park, whereas at St Nicolas, new dishes such as cottage pie which were introduced, were not liked and some children did not take the meals. In general, children liked the local yoghurt but thought the burgers “too meaty in taste”.

Food miles were reduced greatly, though no information on the normal source of the meat was available, other than that it travelled from source to manufacturer to distributor to school. The yoghurt normally comes from Germany, whereas the local yoghurt travelled 12 miles to one school and 14 to the other. Likewise, meat from Sheepdrove Farm travelled 19 or 21 miles.

Food costs were greater, though the yoghurt cost only £0.01 **more** per portion, at £0.14. The organic burgers cost 83% more, whilst the organic minced beef cost 126% of the normal price.

5. Conclusions

There are some powerful messages from this project.

On the supply side:

5.1. Shortfall in capacity

There are chronic supply shortages in some parts of the country, for example Oxfordshire is very short of horticultural produce. For South Moreton School, the local supplier for fruit/vegetables, although able to provide some of the produce from its own farm, had to make up supply shortfalls from other sources, including London markets. HC3S could not identify a supplier of fruit and vegetables in West Berkshire, who could meet their audit requirements, at the time of year the trial was running (January to March 2005).

For school catering, with the exception of small rural schools undertaking their own catering, it may only be realistic to buy fruit and vegetables from a wider area, for example “the South East”, rather than “the County”.

Although there is a much wider range of vegetable produce grown in winter in the UK³ than many people are aware of, much of it is currently supplied to specialist markets such as restaurants, hotels and Farmers' Markets. Introducing these products into school meals through imaginative recipes will take a concerted effort, equivalent to that put in by Jamie Oliver in his recent campaign.

The experience of County Facilities Management in Oxfordshire is that it is relatively easy to source meat locally and they are now extending local sourcing across the county. However, fruit and vegetable suppliers are much harder to identify. The contract for fruit and vegetables is held by a local supplier, but availability of local produce varies.

5.2. Economic and logistical barriers

In spite of the efforts of the Regional Development Agencies, via local food groups, many small local food businesses are unwilling or unable to service contracts put out to tender by public bodies or their contract caterers. Either they cannot meet the price specification or the other requirements, such as delivery schedules for schools, are too onerous.

A questionnaire sent out to 870 NFU members in the Thames Valley offering free listing in a Directory for School Caterers, elicited a response from 34 farmers, of which only 22 were positive.

A 30 week contract, such as that offered for school catering, may not be an economic proposition. For example, when re-tendering the contract for Oxfordshire schools, CFM included a clause about local suppliers (see below⁴). They had no response to the fresh fruit and vegetables invitation and had to re-tender (see above).

5.3. Health and Safety issues

A pragmatic approach is needed when dealing with small suppliers. HACCP audits were carried out, risk assessments were made and a view was taken as to whether all the documentation requested was

³ e.g. multiple varieties of salad leaves, spinach, chard, pak choi and other Chinese leaves, numerous types of brassica, squashes and all the root vegetables

⁴ "8.1. Local Suppliers

As part of the evaluation process Oxfordshire County Council will look at how the bidders make best use of local Contractors in providing this type of contract. Bidders are therefore asked to provide details of any experience they have in managing local supply chains in other contracts and to present any innovative ideas they may have regarding the use of local Contractors for the Oxfordshire contract."

required before proceeding with the supply contract. Small businesses cannot necessarily “tick all the boxes” in a full audit, usually because they cannot produce all the documentation. For high-risk foods such as meat, the auditor must assess the risk and proceed accordingly.

For the caterer:

5.4. Level of commitment

Local sourcing requires a great deal of effort on the part of the caterer. It needs complete commitment from all staff, from the general manager to the cook and her assistant. The time taken to identify local suppliers, to carry out the necessary health and safety checks under the HACCP regime and to set up new contracts will need to be allocated and paid for. Local producers and suppliers will generally only be able to tender for small contracts, split into the smallest possible units.

The benefits may be very valuable. Local food may cost less, as in the case studies for South Moreton and Ladymede schools. It may taste better and the quality may be better (depending on where the food was being sourced from previously). Better quality food is easier and more rewarding to cook. Whether local food is healthier is harder to measure in a project of this nature. The ability to trace the provenance of the ingredients helps in assessing the probable nutritional value, in that meat from identifiable certified farms and vegetables which are days, rather than weeks, out of the ground⁵, are likely to be of higher nutritional content.

The inevitable conclusion is that the caterer should use fresh local ingredients to cook traditional well balanced meals with high nutritional content, and avoid using processed foods with artificial additives as far as possible. However, there is clearly an opportunity for producers to add value to their produce for the school catering market, by carrying out an element of processing such as pre-preparation of vegetables and freezing, which can preserve the nutritional content. The case of Pure Organics (Wiltshire) provides an excellent example of a food manufacturer who has done just this and who is now moving towards local sourcing in response to client request (See Annex 3c).

The school caterer has a difficult balance to achieve, between selling enough meals to sustain a viable service and not giving way to the pressure to offer foods which are perceived as most popular with most children. Local food can purvey a powerful positive

⁵ though this does not apply to storage vegetables such as potatoes and roots

message for sustainability, particularly in rural areas, and if it tastes better and costs less, the payback is well worth the effort.

For the consumer:

5.5. Health comes first

Those parents who responded to the school meal surveys were very interested in what their children were being fed at lunchtime and many called for all processed foods – by which they usually meant so called “child friendly” foods such as pizza, nuggets, twizzlers, smiley potato faces - to be removed from menus. Many did not see the need for “Fun Food Fridays”, which featured in all three schools surveyed.

Most parents said that they were willing to pay more for local and/or organic food and though this can only be tested through trials of this nature, it may give some encouragement to others to try.

6. And what next?

Caterers are anticipating and increasingly responding to Government initiatives on nutritional content of school meals (see Annex 3c) and, for example, CFM are now applying for an accreditation to run nutritional courses. They are also investigating a service which will evaluate their menus nutritionally and it is anticipated that the menus introduced in the new school year in 2005 will be analyzed in this way.

This project demonstrated that sourcing food locally is one way of engaging young children, their parents and, importantly, catering staff, in the subject of healthy eating and sustainable sourcing, to reduce food miles and support local economies. In this, it is very successful.

However, lack of investment in catering equipment and the decline in knowledge and cooking skills amongst catering staff must be reversed if the quality of school food is to be improved.

Case Study – County Facilities Management and South Moreton School

South Moreton School Governors are hoping to invest in the kitchen to make it easier for staff to store fresh meat separately (as required by law). Previously, all meat was ordered in frozen.

Oxfordshire County Facilities Management are planning a half day training session, facilitated by the Oxfordshire Food Group, for school catering staff to learn how to cut and cook red meat. The catalyst for this initiative has been the project described in this report.

BBO Food Groups have identified a need for further work to assess how investment in school kitchens can be planned to be most effective and will submit a proposal in due course.

Making an impact nationally

Our conclusion from this project and other work is that local food sourcing has a contribution to make in improving school meals, but is not the principal solution. We recognize that there are some ground-breaking initiatives such as the work done by Kay Knight in South Gloucestershire, but doubt that the model is replicable in all but a handful of situations.

The key challenges for this project – supply capacity and traceability – came as no great surprise and nor do the findings of the parents' surveys, which tell us that they do not want processed foods to feature in school menus. Apart from "Fun Food Fridays", roast dinners are the most popular choice in primary schools (number 3 of the top 10 main courses in the Sodexo survey of 5 to 7 year olds). But they can't be served every day. It is a real challenge for schools to provide simple freshly-cooked dishes which appeal to a wide variety of tastes and which can be delivered to schools without on-site kitchens. Even "fine dining" contract caterers are increasingly relying on ready-made items for many event menus.

So our prescription is the same as Jamie's: there must be investment in kitchens where they exist, there must be investment in training catering staff to handle fresh raw ingredients and we may have to pay more for school meals. Although the food costs in Oxfordshire reduced, those in Berkshire increased and both county caterers are having to face the prospect of increasing prices for the next academic year.

In our view, there are market opportunities for producers and manufacturers of high quality processed foods, for example organic or additive free meat products, which are specially designed for schools. We include sausages, burgers and other popular dishes such as pasties, made from high quality ingredients, which, although technically "processed", will meet the nutritional standards to be set by Government and not attract the same criticism as some of the brands mentioned in passing earlier in this report. "Fast" food need not be bad food. Such dishes will cost more because they will not include by-products of other processes, fillers or artificial additives.

There are also opportunities for contract caterers to work with producers to develop meat products and seasonal menus for schools, based on what is easily available locally, to take advantage of lower prices when produce is plentiful. This would include developing dishes which use some of the (UK grown winter) produce mentioned earlier.

Another benefit of this type of initiative is the opportunity for increased job satisfaction for purchasing staff.

BBO Food Groups and the Centre for Environmental Studies in the Hospitality Industry will pursue this agenda rigorously in every way possible and hope to submit a further proposal to GOSE in due course.