

Local Food for Local Shops

A toolkit for shopkeepers in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes and Oxfordshire (BBO)

This is a practical toolkit for owners and managers of locally based retail outlets who wish to stock locally produced food and drink. It has been produced by the BBO Food Groups membership organisation that includes food producers and suppliers from across the three Counties.

This toolkit is designed to be used in conjunction with BBO Food Groups' Producer Portfolio pack and the local Food Guide. Both of these will give you a clearer idea of some of the local products and specialities on offer. These are free and can be obtained by phoning the Food Groups on 01865 484116. The same information is also available on the web at www.local-food.net.

This toolkit includes:

1. Some of the commercial opportunities that local food and drink provides. How stocking locally produced goods and specialities can increase your sales and attract new customers.
2. What kind of products to stock and where to start. The three Counties of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes and Oxfordshire produce a wealth of products from organic vegetables to award winning wines and cheeses.
3. How to go about finding producers from the area and how to make contact. This section includes some questions you might ask producers to ensure you get the right supplies and service you want.
4. How to ensure safety and good food handling for specialist products.
5. How to make the most of stocking local products. Getting the word out through marketing and promotion.

Local Food Comes from Our County Say Consumers

The majority of consumers (63%) expect 'local food' to come either from their county or to be produced within 30 miles of where they live or buy it, says new research from IGD - Consumer Watch: Local & British Foods.

A note on 'regional' and 'local' food

There has been a lot of debate over the terms 'regional' and 'local' food. For the purposes of this guide 'local' food means food and drink produced in the Counties of Berkshire, Buckingham & Milton Keynes and Oxfordshire. Generally our message is: tell your customers where food is produced so that they have clear information and there is no reason for confusion.

Contact details for the Food groups:

Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes and Oxfordshire Food Groups, Oxford Brookes University, Gipsy Lane, Oxford OX3 0BP. T.01865 484116

E: localfood@brookes.ac.uk. www.local-food.net.

1. Why stock local food and drink? Here are some of the benefits:

It's in your commercial interest to do so!

- You will attract new customers.
- You will increase sales from existing customers who will use more of their weekly spend in your shop.
- You will establish a point of difference between your shop and those that stock only mainstream brands.
- The demand for local and regional food and drink is increasing.

***'Interest in buying local and regional food is high: 70% of British consumers want to buy local food and 49% want to buy more than they do at the moment.'* IGD Report The local and Regional Food Opportunity 2005**

Local products forge links with the community – your customers

- You are demonstrating that you support local producers who are part of the local community
- Local products mean something to consumers – even if it is simply knowing the farm or area in which they are produced.
- Local products provide a talking point – and word of mouth promotion is some of the best you can get!
- By supporting local producers you are taking positive steps to protect the environment - by reducing the distance food has to travel and to protect the food heritage of you area. This is something to be proud of and to let your customers know about.

Being part of something much bigger

- Local food is now very much part of our food and drink culture. Look at any Sunday colour supplement, glossy magazine or foodie programme on the TV for evidence! You are increasing the profile and value of your business by taking part in this bigger picture.
- Government initiatives from the Regional Development Agencies, Food From Britain, Regional Food Groups and local Government are all investing in media campaigns and promotions to raise consumer awareness – it makes sense to capitalise on this.

Here are some of the reasons customers give for wanting to 'buy local':

***'High quality'
'Special'
'Supporting the local economy'
'Good for the environment'
'Something different'
'Knowing where it comes from and how it has been produced'***

IGD Report The local and Regional Food Opportunity 2005

2. Starting out: what should you sell?

Which local products you stock will depend on your particular business, which you know best of all. Here are some things you may want to think about when choosing what to sell.

- What already sells well in your shop? What products do you sell most of? For example if cheeses sell well you may wish to introduce a local cheese alongside your other lines.
- What could be profitable, high value lines?
- What new products are on offer elsewhere? Check out other retail outlets which sell local products. These may include Farmers' Markets, farm shops and village shops.
- Should products be fresh, frozen or both? What storage facilities and display space have you got or will you need? Are you looking to add a new local line to existing categories or embark on a whole new area such as fresh vegetables?
- Are there specific issues connected to selling certain foods which are new to you? For example storing fresh vegetables or selling meat? You can get help with these issues from your local Environmental Health officer or have a look at Government's Food Standards Agency website www.food.gov.uk.
- Are there the suppliers out there offering the goods and level of supply service that you want? Finding the right supplier who you can work well with is crucial to the ongoing success of your new local product range. See section 3 below for some thoughts on this.

Browsing through the range of food and drink produced locally will give you an idea about what is available and when. While processed products such as cheese and bread are available all the year round some fresh products such as lamb, fruit and vegetables are obviously seasonal and what is available will change depending on the time of year.

When you have an idea of the kinds of goods you may be interested in selling you can start looking for suitable suppliers.

Locally produced goods available for wholesale include:

wine, juices, cheese, (organic) bread, (organic) meat and meat products, jams, jellies, mustards.

Details of all these products are in the Food Groups' Producer Portfolio.

For a showcase of local food from the three Counties it is worth visiting the 'Local Food for Hospitality' trade show organised by the Food Groups. See the events section on the website www.local-food.net For details of this and other events.

3. Sourcing local products

There can be difficulties to sourcing local food and drink which in the past have put some buyers off. These include:

- Lack of information about what producers are out there and what goods they have.
- Problems with regular supplies and delivery
- Dealing with a number of different producers rather than just a few and fears this can lead to increased paperwork and more complicated payments.
- More work on the buyers part (yours!) to source goods.
- Some producers only sell direct to consumers while others have a limited supply of goods to sell.
- Producers don't work in offices! They can therefore be hard to get hold of and you may need to try in the evenings.

A number of these barriers have been or are being overcome. However sourcing and selling local products will be harder than using a conventional 'one stop' wholesale supplier. The rewards will be greater as well. You need to weigh up where you want your business to go and how much time and work you are willing to put in.

Many of the smaller scale, local producers sell direct to the public and not to other retail outlets. This can make general searches for local food difficult as they produce results for the consumer and not for the wholesale market. If you are reading this you are already in a good position to find out about local suppliers! The Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes and Oxfordshire Food Groups specialise in marketing local producers. It publishes a Producer Portfolio and maintains a comprehensive website with a search facility. This is a good place to start. Suppliers represented in the Portfolio will sell wholesale and should have an understanding of your needs. The annual Food Guide is more geared for the retail buyer but it is good publication to browse through to see what is being produced in your area. The Food Groups sometimes hold tasting sessions and 'meet the buyer' events. Contact the Food Groups and let them know that you are interested in these.

Other ways to source locally produced goods include:

- Asking your local community. What is your local farm or food business producing? You can put up an advert up in your shop or seek free editorial in the parish magazine.
- Look in local farm shops, specialist food shops and at Farmers' Markets. Information about Farmers' Markets across the three Counties can be found at www.tvfm.org.uk.
- Search on consumer shopping sites such as Big Barn (www.bigbarn.co.uk) and the Farm Retail Association (www.farma.org.uk). Then contact producers to discuss your needs.
- Tell the Food Groups what your needs are and ask them to publicise them amongst their producer members and in their newsletter. They will do this for free.
- Ask your existing supplier to help you. They may not currently stock local products in their catalogue but may be willing to start.

- There are a number of trade shows which are held around the Country as well as local events. These include events such as the Speciality and Fine Food Show, the Organic and Natural Products show and the Great British Cheese Festival. These may only have a limited number of suppliers local to you but they will be a source of inspiration and contacts. For a showcase of local food from the three counties it is worth visiting the 'Local Food for Hospitality' trade show organised by the Food Groups. For a free invitation call the Food Groups on 01865 484116.

Some useful sources of information on producers and suppliers:

- **Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes and Oxfordshire Food Groups:** T.01865 484116 E: localfood@brookes.ac.uk. www.local-food.net. **Best and most comprehensive one stop source for information about local producers.**
- **The National Farmers' Retail and Markets Association:** T. 0845 230 2150 www.farmshopping.com . **Primarily a retail shopping site but will help with inquires.**
- **Big Barn** T. 01234 871005 E. ant@bigbarn.co.uk. www.bigbarn.co.uk. **Provides area search facilities by postcode. Primarily a retail shopping site but provides access to around 6500 independent food producers and gives information on their goods and services via their websites.**
- **The soil association** www.soilassociation.org. **Provides an online directory of organic producers.**
- **For details of the best sausage shops and suppliers:** www.sausagefans.com.
- **For information on sourcing local beers and ciders contact the campaign for Real Ale.** T; 01727 867201 E. camra@caamra.org.uk www.camra.org.uk.
- **For details of English wines, vine yards and producers see** www.englishwineproducers.com.

Questions to producers

Once you have identified the products you are interested in you need to contact the producer. Here are some of the things you may wish to ask them.

- Details of the product including shelf life, packaging and labelling. Are there special storage requirements you need to know about?
- Wholesale price?
- Do they suggest a recommended retail price?
- Amounts. What will you need to buy? What is the smallest amount they will supply to you and the largest?
- Can they supply the product all the year round or is it seasonal?
- What terms and conditions will you be buying on?
- How and when will delivery be made?
- How will paperwork be handled?
- Can you visit the place of production if you wish? This might be a farm or processing unit.

Some producers will provide 'extras' which can help you with marketing and promotion. You may wish to ask about these as well:

- Can they provide free samples for you and your customers?
- Will they put on tasting sessions for special events?
- Do they have point of sale material? For example leaflets describing the product, posters, display stands or other information.

4. Ensuring food safety and good food handling for local products

Locally produced products should be handled in the same way as any other food products. The principals of good practise and hygiene remain the same. Your local producer will be able to tell you of any particular storage or handling concerns linked to a new or unfamiliar product. If you decide to use the introduction of local food to branch into a new area, for example fresh meat or a cheese counter, than you will have to address handling and storage issues which may be new to your business. The best place to start is to contact your local Environmental Health Department. Tell them what you want to do and ask their advice. Your local Trading Standards Department will help with issues such as labelling, weights and measures, legal requirements and guidance and trade descriptions. They produce a number of useful guides. Another good source of general information on all matters to do with food safety is the Food Standards Agency website: www.food.gov.uk.

5. How to make the most of stocking local products: getting the word out through marketing and promotion.

By stocking locally produced goods you are doing something special and worthwhile which can add value to your business. It is important that you let customers and potential customers know what you are doing. There are many ways to do this.

In the shop

- Do the products come with point of sale material? Or can you or the producer provide it? If so make sure this is clearly displayed. Include:
 - Details of where the product comes from for example the farm and its location,
 - Any special points of production which make it special for example organic or free range,
 - Any other relevant points of interest.

Some goods come with leaflets which include more detailed information such as recipes. If there is no printed material or photographs available you may consider putting up a board on which you can write details of goods. This is particularly useful if you are stocking seasonal goods which will change frequently.

Outside the shop

Let people know that your shop is selling something special and is worth coming into. You might consider:

- A board outside
- A display of local goods outside
- Information in the shop window

Special events

Special events allow you to promote particular goods and give you a 'hook' to hang other publicity on.

- Hold tasting sessions at the shop (will the producer organise this for you?)
- Have a display stand with a tasting session at the local fate or village event.
- Is one of your producers willing to come and talk to a local group (such as the school or WI) about their products?
- Can you join up with a larger event and capitalise on their promotion and activity? British Food Fortnight is a good example.

British Food Fortnight is a national event organised by Food From Britain to promote Regional Food and Drink. They produce an information guide for retailers on how to take part and can provide display material and help with promotion of events. The fortnight normally takes place in September - October.

**British Food Fortnight
PO Box 16141
London SE11 4ZH
Tel: 020 7840 9292**

**Email: info@britishfoodfortnight.co.uk
www.britishfoodfortnight.co.uk**

Promoting to a wider audience

Send information to the local press in the form of a press release. Local press are interested in local stories and will often pick these up especially if you can provide a good picture or human interest angle. Remember to:

- Highlight the main point you want to get across:
 - 'Village shop teams up with local farm'
 - 'School kids taste local fare at special food event'
- If you are running an event put in:
 - the date
 - time
 - location
 - 'on the day' contact telephone number
 - Do people need to book?
 - Is everyone welcome?
 - Can they find out more details by phoning you or looking at your website?
- Include a photograph if you have one or offer to provide one on request
- Add your contacts details for the editor to find out more information
- Follow up with a phone call and invite someone from the press to attend.

'Local and regional products provide a considerable opportunity for communications in the media, raising and enhancing the profiles of the product, the supplier and the retailer.'
IGD Report The local and Regional Food Opportunity 2005

Paying for publicity

- You may consider it worth paying for an advert in your local paper or parish newsletter. Always ask if the paper will give you editorial coverage if you are placing an advert.

Other things to check out

Other marketing ideas include: a Christmas ordering service, adverts and inserts in local papers and school magazines, promotion at village events, links with local co-operatives, write-ups in tourist brochures and other press, and leaflet drops to the houses in the area.

- Your Local Food Groups. Do they produce a local Food Guide that you can be included in? This may be free or there may be a small charge. Often this is combined with a listing on the group's website.

- If you are in a tourist area there may be a visitor guide you can be included in. Remember you are offering something special which is connected to the locality, it is therefore of interest to visitors. Contact your local County, District or Town council and ask for the officer in charge of tourism.
- Are there other businesses in your village or area such as the pub or garage that will put promotional information up for you?
- Are there other people or groups in your area who want to find out about and promote local produce? You might work with them to put on promotional events such as a local product festival. Groups such as the W.I., Green Party, local environmental groups, Countryside Alliance and Parish Council are all worth approaching.

Further help and advice

If you get stuck and feel you want further help and advice in sourcing and selling local food and drink contact the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes and Oxfordshire Food Groups, Oxford Brookes University, Gipsy Lane, Oxford OX3 0BP. T.01865 484116
E: localfood@brookes.ac.uk. www.local-food.net.

Useful websites:

www.local-food.net.

www.buylocalfood.co.uk

www.regionalfoodanddrink.co.uk