The Effectiveness of the Policy Support Environment for Local Food Production, Competitiveness, Innovation and Growth

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Local Food as an Engine for Local Business

http://www.locfood.no
LOCFOOD: Project Aims

What? European Union (EU) funded INTERREG IVC LOCFOOD (Local Food as an Engine for Local Business) project (2012 – 2014)
- to improve regional policies supporting food SMEs in rural areas
- focus on artisans and micro-businesses (< 10 employees)

Who? 13 partners in 9 European countries – local authorities and development agencies, including 2 partners in Northern Ireland

How? Review of current policy / support to food sector:
- Survey of producers – experience of support and levels of innovation
- Consultations with stakeholders and producers
LOCFOOD NI Steering Group

- Ulster University
- Down District Council
- DARD/Agri-Food Strategy Board Secretariat
- DETI
- Invest NI
- NI Food and Drink Association
- NI Tourist Board
- Rural Network NI/Rural Development Council
NI Agri-Food Context

• AFSB ‘Going for Growth’ Strategy
• NITB Naturally NI Strategy
• Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020
• New Councils from 2015 – with enhanced LED responsibilities
• NI European Entrepreneurial Region 2015
• 2016 Year of Food
• SEED Food Programmes experience
Key Activities

- Mapping of policy and strategies
  - DARD, Invest NI etc

- Surveys of small food producers
  - LOCFOOD project total 457
    - NI total 39

- Study visits to partner regions
  - 7 study visits organised

- Identification of Good Practices
  - 77 policy and company Good Practices identified
European Results

• Relatively high levels of product innovation recorded in most partner regions (65% compared to 53% for EU Community Innovation Survey)
• The majority of product/service innovations new to the business rather than the market
• Process innovation (48% of respondents)
• Owner-manager is main source of innovation – followed by customers and suppliers
• Less reliance on support from external sources such as universities, consultants and government
• Lack of networking/collaboration activity
• Key barriers to innovation include cost and regulations
NI Results

- In line with European results on innovation aspects
- Micro food producers use a wide variety of sources for innovation
- Engagement with introductory levels of Government support (e.g. Innovation Vouchers scheme) but not advanced forms of support
- However, a number of key barriers to further adoption of support including:
  - understanding and coherency of support
  - regulations and level of bureaucracy
  - networking capabilities
NI Results (cont.)

- Barriers to Networking
  - Trust and shared values
  - Loss of company secrets
  - Network sustainability
  - Costs of engagement
Policy/Programme ‘Gaps’

• Co-ordinated approach

• Data on micro food producers and their activities

• Complex funding/eligibility criteria and bureaucracy of funded programmes

• Co-operation between food producers, and educational institutions

• Sustainability of networks

• Generic nature of support programmes
Identification of Good Practices

• 77 good practice initiatives highlighted, at policy and company levels
• Wide ranging objectives and involve multiple target groups and stakeholders
• The value of a network and trade name, for the food business and the region
• The sustainability of projects is a major theme - these initiatives need on-going administrative and funding support
• Possible adoption of aspects of good practice in NI
## Recommendations/Select Actions

### Business development support
- Further programmes on SEED ‘Food to Follow’ model
- Link InvestNI/DARD to companies for advanced programme support
- Promote Innovation Vouchers

### Collaboration
- Develop knowledge transfer between large/micro firms
- Encourage collaboration through innovation vouchers
- Explore collaborative solutions to exporting
- Include provision for collaboration through Rural Development Programme

### Public procurement
- Promote local food through events supply contracts
- Break down large contracts enabling smaller producers/suppliers to compete
- Review current schools support for local food sourcing
Recommendations/Select Actions (cont.)

Local food experience
- Showcase local food at official events
- Support local and quality street food providers as part of local festivals
- Create/support local food circle/food network
- Establish/further develop quality food markets in local towns

Food and Tourism
- Specify provision of quality local food at conferences/tourism events
- Minimum one annual food-focused festival in each council area
- Identify PDO/PGI status foods and support applications
- Food tourism trails
Project Outputs to Date

• Response to consultations (e.g. Agri-Food Strategy Board)

• Report to ARD Committee (May 2014)

• ‘Local Food: Making Small Producers Part of the Bigger Picture’ Conference (June 2014)

• Input to DARD Rural Development Programme 2014 -2020 Food sector–relevant Measures

• Draft Model Local Authority Local Food Policy
Further Information

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European partners’ Good Practice information on LOCFOOD website at: http://www.locfood.no
Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS)

...is a forum that encourages debate on a wide range of research findings, with the overall aim of promoting evidence-based policy and law-making within Northern Ireland