



## 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*



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

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# LOCFOOD

**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 LOCFODD 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>





Northern Ireland  
Assembly



Queen's University  
Belfast



The Open  
University



Ulster  
University

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