



Centre for Local
Economic Strategies

local work

Making Local Food Work

Issue: 85

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Introduction

In September 2007, the *Making Local Food Work*¹ programme was awarded £10 million, by the Big Lottery Fund, over the five years to 2012.² The Plunkett Foundation³ along with a consortium of partners⁴ will use this funding to bring lasting benefits to a range of communities, including isolated rural areas where commercial retail is not considered viable and urban communities where people do not currently have sufficient access to local healthy food.

The specialist and niche programme will add value across all regions of England by developing collaborative responses to food access needs within communities. These collaborative responses cover a breadth of issues, including: community-supported agriculture, community-owned shops and distribution hubs, to name a few examples. However, they all have a social enterprise ethos at their core. These core values unify the activity into one large programme, *Making Local Food Work*. In exploring the development of this programme, this Local Work looks in more detail at the following:

- the policy context behind the programme;
- the nature of social and community enterprise;
- the aims of making local food work;
- why the programme is necessary;
- why social enterprise approaches are being used;
- what the programme aims to achieve;
- the next steps.

The policy context

Making Local Food Work is about promoting and developing sustainable community and social enterprises to bring together food producers and consumers. The programme aims to reconnect people and land through food; increasing access to fresh, healthy, local food with

¹ <http://www.makinglocalfoodwork.co.uk/>

² <http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/>

³ The Plunkett Foundation is a Social Enterprise Strategic Partner of the Office of the Third Sector³. As part of the Cabinet Office, the Office of the Third Sector leads work across government to support the environment for a thriving third sector (voluntary and community groups, social enterprises, charities, co-operatives and mutuals), enabling the sector to campaign for change, deliver public services, promote social enterprise and strengthen communities. The specific remit of the Plunkett Foundation as a strategic partner is to represent the voice of, and develop policy for, rural social enterprises in England.

⁴ Co-operatives^{uk}, Country Markets Ltd, Campaign to Protect Rural England, Sustain, Soil Association, FARMA

clear, traceable origins. In recent years, the national and local policy context has illustrated the increasing importance of these issues and has stressed the need to address them more effectively - thereby paving the way for a programme such as *Making Local Food Work*. In particular the following challenges have had a particular impact:

Sustainable relationship between people and food

There is growing feeling that consumers have increasingly become disconnected from food producers and the land where the food is grown, reared and produced. Defra's *Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food*⁵ aimed to reverse this decline and promote sustainable relationships between producers and consumers. This is in line with the key objective of the 2002 Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food⁶ 'to reconnect our food and farming industry; to reconnect farming with its market and the rest of the food chain; to reconnect the food chain and the countryside; and to reconnect consumers with what they eat and how it is produced'. In order to achieve a paradigm shift in the relationship between people and food, sustainable principles must be at the core of such a relationship. Sustain, the Alliance for Better Food and Farming, actively promotes sustainable food as 'food that is produced, processed and traded in ways that contribute to thriving local economies and sustainable livelihoods; protect the diversity of both plants and animals and avoid damaging natural resources; and provide social benefits, such as good quality food and educational opportunities.'⁷ A focus on sustainable activities and policy has been a major driver in the development of the *Making Local Food Work* programme.

Control of food supply

There is increasing controversy surrounding supermarkets and the role that they play in controlling local food supply and local economies. In May 2008 The Competition Commission forced Britain's biggest supermarkets to free up more than 60 sites for rivals after announcing the findings of a two-year investigation into the £120 billion grocery market.⁸ The watchdog called for supermarkets to scrap restrictive covenants and exclusivity agreements on key sites in towns and cities across the UK in a package of measures designed to increase competition in the sector. More generally supermarkets also face criticism for the roles that they play in forcing local shops to close down, pressuring local producers and not paying them a fair price for their goods, increasing food miles and importing food from abroad all of which, it is argued, reduces choice, forces people to travel further and undermines rural industry and farming and economies. These issues highlight the need for consumers to have greater control over the food they buy and the food they eat, as well as local land and local economies.

The decline in neighbourhood services

The decline in neighbourhood shops and services has, for some people, sounded the death knell for Britain's local economies. The New Economics Foundation (nef) has referred to these areas as Ghost towns. nef argue that between 1995 and 2000, the UK lost 20 per cent of some of its most vital institutions: corner shops, grocers, high street banks, post offices and pubs, amounting to a cumulative loss of over 30,000 local economic outlets. On current trends, the number of local outlets will have dropped by nearly a third in the two decades to 2010. The result is communities and neighbourhoods without easy access to such essential elements of both the economy and the social fabric of the country.

Improving health and well-being

There is an increasing Government focus on improving the health and well being of the population, this has particularly been the case as increasing wealth and health inequalities have emerged. For example, the UK's GDP has increased by almost 75% in the last 20 years⁹ and unemployment has almost halved in the past 10 years¹⁰, but at the same time, there are

⁵ Defra, (2002). *Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food – Facing the Future*

⁶ Cabinet Office, (2002). *Farming and Food: a sustainable Future: Report of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food.*

⁷ <http://www.sustainweb.org/page.php?id=402>

⁸ http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/industry_sectors/retailing/article3850228.ece

⁹ GDP in 1979 was £506 billion, in 2002 the figure was £859 billion (Office of national Statistics)

¹⁰ Unemployment between March and May 1992 was 9.8%, between October and December 2002, the figure was 5.1% (Office of National Statistics, International Labour Organisation definition of Unemployment)

twice the number of people on low incomes as was the case in the 1970s¹¹ and in two-thirds of households living in social housing, the head of the household, is not in paid work, this has been the case throughout the last decade.¹² Moreover, the number of Incapacity Benefit claimants is stuck at around 2.7 million and has been for the last 8 years¹³. There are also considerable inequalities, in physical and mental health. Policy responses such as Healthy Schools Programme; Children's Centres/Sure Start; the School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme; Breast Feeding and Weaning Support; and the Healthy Start Initiative have emerged and these have focused on children, especially in relation to their eating and exercising habits. Although these are positive shoots, these efforts highlight a need to focus more on the connections between food, land and health, for the whole community and particularly in rural areas.

Social and community enterprise approaches

The *Making Local Food Work* programme is about promoting and developing sustainable community and social enterprises which seeks solutions to these challenges by reconnecting food producers and consumers or put another way - enterprise run with a social purpose, for the benefit of prime stakeholders and communities. There are many definitions of social enterprise, the most accepted one of which is as follows:

A Social Enterprise is defined as a business with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximise profits for shareholders and owners.¹⁴

Social enterprises tackle a wide range of social and environmental issues and operate in all parts of the economy. They include local community enterprises, social firms, mutual organisations such as co-operatives and large-scale organisations operating nationally or internationally. There is no single legal model for social enterprise. They include companies limited by guarantee, industrial and provident societies and companies limited by shares; some organisations are unincorporated and others are registered charities.

One of the easiest ways to understand social enterprises is to clarify what they are not:

- ❑ They are not **investor-led enterprises**. In other words, they do not exist to provide a financial return to their owners, be they shareholders or members.
- ❑ They are not **voluntary organisations**. In other words, they do not depend mainly on grants, public subsidies and voluntary labour for their viability, although grants and subsidies may form part of their business model.

They are genuine enterprises, which charge for the products or services they deliver. They are distinct from the public sector because they are autonomous, entrepreneurial and earn revenue through trade in goods and services. They are distinct from investor-led businesses because they are driven by the aim of providing social benefits rather than maximising shareholder value for investors. A Community Enterprise, or Community Service Business as they are also known, is a social enterprise that trades within a geographical area or with a defined interest group, and sometimes both.

Social Enterprises in Rural Areas

Using Defra's formulation for defining rural areas, the Plunkett Foundation considers all areas of the country with a population of less than 10,000 to be rural. Therefore, rural Social Enterprises are those organisations whose trading activities are mainly carried out in rural

¹¹ Department Work and Pensions

¹² Survey of English Housing, ODPM, 2002

¹³ Nomis - https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/output/dn87000/%7B843FED49-ECB0-4546-8F85-89A3259FD12A%7D/nomis_2008_05_02_164637.xls

¹⁴ Social Enterprise: A strategy for success, Department of Trade and Industry 2002

areas or even if the enterprise is based in an urban location, if it exists to provide benefits for rural people either as suppliers, customers or as members, then the social enterprise may also be considered as rural. Therefore, an urban-based farmers market, owned by farmers, would be regarded of as a rural social enterprise.¹⁵ The Plunkett Foundation broadly classified rural social enterprises as falling into three categories: community service, rural collaboration and community development¹⁶:

Community Service Businesses

Community Service Businesses trade within a geographical area or with a defined interest group, and sometimes both. They typically provide goods or services which the private sector or state no longer provides. The term community business is often used interchangeably with the term community enterprise. Common types include community-owned village shops, community transport operators, community-owned pubs or cafes and community childcare facilities.

Rural Economic Collaboration

These types of enterprises are usually formed by groups of individual businesses (often sole traders) to procure common services or to jointly market similar types of products. They are self-help enterprises and often operate in a highly commercial manner. Many may not be regarded as social enterprises if they do not have explicitly social objectives. Common types include Farmers' Markets, craft marketing co-operatives and agricultural co-operatives.

Community Development Enterprises

Community Development Enterprises aim to provide broader social and economic benefits to their host communities through a range of commercial activities. They are often, but not exclusively, community-owned but do not only provide services to their own members. Common types include Development Trusts, Social Firms, Community Land Trusts and community businesses.

Increasingly, rural social enterprises are stepping up to the mark and finding ways to overcome the many challenges uniquely faced by rural communities such as the greater distances involved in travelling within and between communities; a widely dispersed population; poor access to jobs and services; poor public transport; a lack of shops; and expensive fuel and goods. Through a wide range of imaginative projects rural social enterprises are delivering key services, including the recycling of domestic waste, retail services, housing and transport.¹⁷

Making Local Food Work

Making Local Food Work is an initiative that aims to reconnect people and land through food; increasing access to fresh, healthy, local food with clear, traceable origins.

In September 2007, the *Making Local Food Work* portfolio was awarded £10 million by The National Lottery through Big Lottery Fund and will operate over the next five years until September 2012.

The Plunkett Foundation, with a consortium of partners, will bring lasting benefits to a range of communities from isolated rural areas where commercial retail is not considered viable to urban communities and where people do not currently have sufficient access to local healthy food. This specialist and niche programme will add value across all regions of England by developing collaborative responses to answer food access needs within communities.

¹⁵ Rural Lifelines: Older People and Rural Social Enterprises – Their role as providers and beneficiaries of service provision in rural England, Plunkett Foundation et al (2004)

¹⁶ Rural Lifelines: Older People and Rural Social Enterprises – Their role as providers and beneficiaries of service provision in rural England, Plunkett Foundation et al (2004)

¹⁷ Social Enterprise: A guide to the role and potential of Rural Social Enterprise in the South East of England, Plunkett Foundation (2008)

The aim of the programme

The aim of the programme is to reconnect people and land through issues of food, by increasing access to healthy, local or organic food and food that has a clear provenance. It will use social and community enterprise approaches to link communities to producers and it will build the capacity of the social and community enterprise sector, and those who support and advise them, to develop collaborative responses to meeting the needs of all sections of the community in regard to food security. As a specialist and niche proposal intervening across all regions of England, the programme will work with sub-regional and local organisations and other Big Lottery Changing Spaces programmes to add value to other more general approaches to these issues.

The need for the programme

Since the beginnings of industrialisation there has been growing dislocation between the production and the consumption of food. In the nineteenth century this led to the Chartist demands for every family to have one acre and a cow; to the allotment movement; and to the organisation of consumer co-operatives to provide healthy and unadulterated food at fair prices. In the latter half of the twentieth century this dislocation accelerated with the onset of global markets and the industrial scale production of food. This has had a number of impacts, including:

- ❑ a growing demand from consumers to have control over the sources and provenance of their food¹⁸;
- ❑ lack of access to food for some vulnerable groups as small retail outlets disappear and a few supermarket multiples dominate the market for both the producer and the consumer.¹⁹ Rural communities have felt the disappearance of local shops particularly keenly with some 71% of all rural settlements now without a local food shop²⁰;
- ❑ the relative expense and inaccessibility of fresh and healthy food in some communities²¹;
- ❑ a squeezing of income for small independent producers and their increasing isolation²²;
- ❑ the market's lack of understanding and support for food producers²³;
- ❑ growth in obesity among children and adults and indications of unhealthy diets²⁴;
- ❑ environmental degradation both in terms of use of the land and large increases in food miles.

The industrial pattern of production and marketing 'disconnects people from the direct experience of producing food as well as destroying the natural cycles that allow ecosystems to be sustained.'²⁵ In response to these trends, there is evidence that both consumers and producers have an urge to 'reconnect', and there is evidence that both consumers and

¹⁸ 'Retail and Foodservice Opportunities for Local Food' IGD/ Food From Britain 2006

¹⁹ Lang, T., Sharpe, R and Caraher, M (2002) Food, access to shops and transport: What movement since PAT13? A report to the Social Exclusion Unit

²⁰ The State of the Countryside Report, 2005, The Countryside Agency

²¹ Dowler, E. (2001) Poverty Bites. Child Poverty Action Group; Leather, S (1996) Making of modern malnutrition: an overview of food poverty in the UK. London: the Caroline Walker Trust; Watson, A (2002) Hunger from the Inside: the experience of food poverty in the UK. Sustain, London; Hitchman, C. et al (2002) Inconvenience Food: the struggle to eat well on a low income, London: Demos; SEU (2000) Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy Policy Action Team 13 Report on Shopping Access for People in Deprived Areas.

²² 'Ministers expect that by 2005 as many as 25% of farms – almost all small ones – will have closed or merged, with 50,000 people forced to leave the industry...' Patrick Wintour, The Guardian, 11/4/01

²³ See, for example, Curry, D (2002) The Report of the Commission on Farming and Food

²⁴ Acheson, D (1998) Inequalities in Health Report HMSO; Department of Health (2004) Choosing Health: making healthy choices easier; DoH (2005) Choosing a Better Diet: a food and health action plan.

²⁵ People, Land and Sustainability – a global view of community gardening, Report, University of Nottingham (2001)

producers support the types of initiatives which enable more direct contact between them. These include:

- ❑ the establishment of the first **farmers' market** in the UK in 1997 in Bath, in Bristol in 1998, with some 500 farmers' markets now believed to be operating throughout the UK;
- ❑ the growth of **community owned village shops**, with some 150 having been established in the last 15 years;
- ❑ the mushrooming of **food co-operatives and food buying groups**, with over 250 identified on the Co-operatives^{UK} database and others identified by particular initiatives, such as the Rural Regeneration Unit in Cumbria (35) and Somerset Food Links (30);
- ❑ a plethora of **community supported agriculture** projects, such as farm support groups to buying groups linking the consumer closely to the land and the means of production;
- ❑ the **Country Markets** movement, with home-bound members of some 65 county-based co-operatives selling their home-made, home-baked or home-grown produce direct to the public at approximately 450 Country Markets, Farmers' Markets and other outlets;
- ❑ **community food enterprises** of many sorts. Sustain contacted 900 for its report *Social enterprise for community projects*²⁶ ranging from box schemes, community cafés, joint buying projects, fresh food distribution schemes, local food centres and healthy cooking clubs;
- ❑ the development of a range of individual **local food hubs and centres** for local food around England, seeking to act as local food distribution hubs or integrated retailers and wholesalers of foods from their locality.

All of these examples demonstrate the use of enterprise-based self-help approaches to meet community need. However, despite the evident interest in these approaches and the desire of producers and consumers to use them to 'reconnect', they still remain relatively small scale and marginal to the mainstream economy. Moreover, many of these initiatives struggle to survive without grant support or large contributions of voluntary effort from their participants, and live on a permanent knife-edge of commercial viability²⁷. The *Making Local Food Work* programme aims to respond to this need, by:

- ❑ examining which of these social and community enterprise models work and don't work as businesses, from the point of view of long-term sustainability and in terms of their impact on their host communities;
- ❑ supporting the replication and mainstreaming of those models that are known to work or are found to work after piloting;
- ❑ ensuring that they not only work as community enterprises, but they also have good governance, so they can trade effectively and properly meet the needs of their stakeholders;
- ❑ providing appropriate business support so they can flourish as sustainable community enterprises;

²⁶ Social enterprise for community food projects: a solution to the funding conundrum, or just another fashionable magic bullet? A policy briefing paper, Sustain, 2005

²⁷ e.g. see Plunkett Foundation's Rural Lifelines report on research conducted jointly with Age Concern, PRIME and the Countryside Agency in 2004, and the Impact of Social Enterprise on Rural England, Plunkett Foundation for the Countryside Agency, 2004

- ❑ providing tools, training materials, information and experiences to community enterprises and groups.

The objectives of the *Making Local Food Work* programme

The central ethos of the programme is that the needs of land and people – producers and consumers – are interlinked and interdependent, and that community enterprise can connect these links in a mutually beneficial manner. The common fabric binding the portfolio together is people. Through local food, producers and consumers can support one another and improve their quality of life.

Local food social enterprises also have the ability of meeting multiple community goals, including that of addressing social exclusion, as well as enabling individuals to access appropriate work or business opportunities in a sustainable and growing manner.

Local food can help create a clear identity and enable a community to feel 'pride of place,' creating inclusive communities, with a shared identity and a sense of belonging. Using the delivery techniques and tools of individual projects, the programme partners are focused on improving the quality of life of the project beneficiaries, through the empowerment of people and their communities

Delivering *Making Local Food Work*

The programme comprises of six delivery strands and four supporting themes. Each of the delivery strands seeks to refine and replicate a form of community enterprise model to reconnect food producers and consumers. The supporting themes underpin the implementation of the delivery strands.

The six different delivery project strands will increase the supply of local food via various mechanisms of co-operative production, manufacture, distribution, community retailing and education. These project strands will provide direct ways to reconnect people to the land. The four supporting themes will provide the participation and governance tools, specialist enterprise advice and support, food webs and mapping capability and portfolio evaluation, research and communication to promote local food in the best possible way. All ten projects are critical to the overall objective of reconnecting people and land through the issues of local food.

The six delivery strands are as follows:

- ❑ community support agriculture;
- ❑ food co-ops and buying groups;
- ❑ cooperatively owned farmers' markets;
- ❑ community shops and local food;
- ❑ sustainable models of home produced food;
- ❑ distribution and supply.

And the four supporting themes are as follows:

- ❑ governance and structures;
- ❑ enterprise support for community based food enterprises;
- ❑ mapping local food webs;
- ❑ evaluation, information and communication.

Below is a case study to illustrate the type of work and groups that will be supported through the *Making Local Food Work* programme

Case Study: Stroud Community Supported Agriculture

Stroud Community Agriculture Ltd is a new model for sustainable farming. It builds on co-operation and mutual support so that the risks and rewards of farming are shared between the farmers and consumers. The consumers commit themselves to supporting the farm and providing a fair income for the farmers. The farmers can then develop the health and fertility of the farm, its wildlife and environment. All the produce from the farm is shared between the supporting consumers or sold locally if there is a surplus.

Stroud Community Agriculture Ltd is incorporated as a Community Co-operative where every member has a vote, which puts everyone on an equal basis. The inspiration for this initiative was drawn from the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) movement already widely established on organic and biodynamic farms in North America, Japan and Germany. It grew out of a growing interest in sourcing locally produced food and in a deep felt wish to transform our economic system into one of mutual support.

Gradually the principles and objectives of Stroud Community Agriculture were established and the decision was taken to start by growing vegetables in a one-acre walled garden at Brookthorpe. It now became necessary to have a formalised structure and after several further months work Stroud Community Agriculture Ltd was founded as an Industrial Provident Society. This new co-operative structure had a not-for-profit goal and gave each member an equal say in its management.

Due to changing circumstances the operation moved the following year from the walled garden in Brookthorpe to Hawkwood College near Stroud. A full 23 acres was now rented and a part-time farmer was taken on. In addition to vegetables, it became possible to run a small beef suckler herd, have some pigs and offer a regular supply of meat to members. The pig initiative started as an independent community enterprise called 'Hog Hands'. A group of people agreed to share responsibility for their care. They then received a share of the harvest. Later the pigs were incorporated as part of the whole farm. A sow is kept and she produces regular litters of piglets.

By keeping a herd of cattle, it was now possible to maintain soil fertility and ensure good crops of vegetables could be grown without relying on external sources of manure and compost. The herd is maintained throughout the year on the farm's own grass and hay.

Summary

Making Local Food Work primarily aims to increase the robustness of the local food sector by strengthening the social connection of people to food, by:

- ❑ **Improving the health and well-being of people** by improving diet and increasing access to healthy food;
- ❑ **Reducing the dominance of urbanism** by improving the range of local food retailers in rural areas, enhancing the access people have to these retailers and widening control of food supply as well as offering place specific policies which promote rural regeneration and social inclusion;
- ❑ **Taking back control of food supply** by growing food locally and reducing the distances the food travels to be sold and the distances people travel to purchase it.

As a whole the programme aims to influence and educate consumers of the *value* of local food; not just the health value of local seasonal food or the economic value to producers, but relates to the social fabric that underpins communities.

Social and community enterprises have a proven history of making a real difference to the lives of both urban and rural people. Over the next five years, *Making Local Food Work* will evaluate the impact of local food groups to their local communities; explore the use of social enterprise approaches to food needs; and share information, learning and motivation with consumers about local landscape, value and heritage of food in their community. The

progression of the programme will be followed by CLES and highlighted in a future edition of Local Work.

The Plunkett Foundation²⁸ was founded in 1919 by Sir Horace Plunkett with the aim of improving the livelihoods of rural people through co-operative and social enterprise. As the leading centre of expertise around rural social and co-operative enterprise, their aim is to promote and support rural social enterprise by influencing policy, reviewing trends and developments and communicating the benefits of rural social enterprise through training and educational activities.

Local Work is one of a series of regular policy reports produced by the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES). CLES is a not-for-profit think doing organisation, consultancy and network of subscribing organisations specialising in regeneration, economic development and local governance. CLES also publishes Bulletin, Rapid Research and bespoke Briefings on a range of issues.

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²⁸ <http://www.plunkett.co.uk/>