

## **Food and Drink sector support activities – Economy – Devon County Council**

### **Background:**

In 2007, the Economy Unit commissioned a Food and Drink Infrastructure Study to identify the barriers to growing the sector and determining appropriate interventions from the County Council. The study concluded that there are the following barriers to growth: lack of ICT take-up and skills; lack of technical and generic skills; lack of business support; lack of technical expertise; need for increased profile / brand; inadequate distribution networks; some areas of Devon lagging behind others in terms of adding value and promoting produce; and difficult for local businesses to sell to the public sector. The Devon Economic Strategy 2008 recognises Food and Drink as a priority sector, referring to the need to develop supply chains and distribution networks, public sector procurement, joint working between businesses and increased ICT skills and take up. Following on from this research, we are currently carrying out a number of key projects to support the sector, including:

### **Supporting Devon's food and drink businesses:**

Getting more local food into public sector services in Devon. We are leading on a programme of work that includes a series of workshops aimed at producers, suppliers and buyers, as well as influencing policy and practice within some of Devon's key public sector organisations. The current focus of our work is in our schools and care homes and a partnership project with Northern Devon Healthcare Trust working with the Barnstaple hospital and the community hospitals.

Promoting Devon's food and drink to local people and visitors. We are supporting producers by helping to run high profile food events & festivals across the county to promote Devon's produce, including a month of events in October called the 'Devon Celebration of Food', Exeter Festival of Food and Drink and the Devon County Show. We also run a website called 'foodiedevon' which provides information on Devon's producers and contains a section for producers to find out about our projects and other sources of support for their business.

Coordination of food and drink activities across the county. We help to ensure that activities going on around the county are joined-up where appropriate and we support a range of activities to help ensure support is focussed where it is most needed. Our partners include area-based food groups and local and regional public sector organisations.

Coordinating the Devon Food and Farming Board. The Devon Rural Network coordinates this group to help give a voice to Devon's farmers, providing networking opportunities and developing priorities and actions such as a lobbying campaign and research activities

ICT for food and drink businesses project - Following the initial 'free workshops' where Devon food and drink producers were shown case studies as examples of how they could make their business grow and become more efficient by making more use of ICT systems, this project is in the phase of delivering the six 'essential' ICT training sessions. Many have signed up to attend the customised ICT training sessions to help them drive their business forward and stay ahead of the game. This will be followed by the opportunity for support in purchasing software.

### **Improving access to local food and drink within local communities:**

Developing Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) initiatives. We are getting involved in the development of these across the county, with a particular focus in some of our 'priority' communities to help people on low-incomes to access healthy, local food and engage people in food production and healthy eating.

Raising awareness about Devon's food and drink. The food events, festivals, foodiedevon website and publications help to promote Devon's businesses and help people to find out more about Devon's unique quality produce and where to buy. These activities also help to educate people about the benefits buying local food and drink brings to the economy, community and the environment.

*For more information please contact Kathryn Edwards on 01392 382949  
Kathryn.j.edwards@devon.gov.uk*