



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Regional and Local Food and Drink Promotion

A How-To Guide for SMEs and Regional Food and Drink
Organisations

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Introduction

We are the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. We're responsible for improving and protecting the environment, growing the green economy, sustaining thriving rural communities and supporting our world-class food, farming and fishing industries.

What we eat and drink, and how and where it is made, is part of our nation's story. Our food and drink is recognised across the world for its quality, tradition, and innovation. This growing reputation for high-quality food and drink produced to high standards of food safety, animal welfare and sustainability is driving increased consumer demand both at home and abroad. It provides a real opportunity for growth across all regions of the UK. We want to support food and drink businesses across England to tap into that growing demand and ensure that they can access the support, training and information they need to grow their business.

This guide is for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and the regional food and drink organisations that support them. It aims to highlight best practice examples of developing a regional or local food identity to support local food and drink businesses, with a focus on developing local partnerships between organisations in the food and drink sector.

Reflections on buying local

By Floortje Hoette, CEO, Produced in Kent

Benefits of local food and drink

Local independent food and drink businesses play a pivotal role in UK society and contribute to a better food system through:

- Providing jobs and adding value to the local economy.
- Connecting, or reconnecting, consumers with the land and animals that their food comes from.
- Offering a healthy alternative to super processed foods high in sugar, salt and protein.
- Receptive to, and in some areas spearheading, a more sustainable operational model with a smaller carbon footprint, using local supply chains, maintaining high animal welfare standards, adopting regenerative farming methods, and dealing with food waste responsibly.
- Maintaining the countryside that gives the UK its unique character and appeal to visitors.
- Creating a sense of belonging and community through their business and product.
- Providing a food and drink experience and infrastructure to visitors and the tourism industry: food and drink is the glue of any tourist experience and greatly influences its success.

Changing consumer behaviour

Various studies that have been undertaken in the UK and abroad in the past year indicate a shift in consumer buying towards local food. But how do we connect with the – much larger - group that has not yet changed its buying habits? The main inhibitors that prevent consumers from buying local seem to be:

1. **Price:** the perception that local food is more (or too) expensive is persistent.
 - How do we flip this perception on its head and turn it into a conversation about the value of food?
 - How do we convey the message that the price of food is relative to how food is used by the consumer?
2. **Access:** In order to buy local, people need to be exposed to local products and to the industry that sits behind them. We need to make local food more **visible**.
 - How do we nurture and support infrastructure that showcases local products: farmers' markets, farm shops, high streets, food hubs, country fairs?
 - How do we create inclusive spaces where people can come together to taste, cook and learn about local food and its many benefits?
 - How do we connect the wider public - residents and visitors - with the people who grow, sell and serve local food and drink?
 - And how do we ensure that local food has fair access to public and commercial procurement channels?

Cross-sector collaboration

Cross-sector collaboration in the promotion of local food is key. Businesses, business support organisations, academia, think tanks and Government must work closely together in developing a shared language and messaging on:

- The cost (and value) of producing good food
- The health benefits and green credentials of local and sustainably produced food
- The local independent food and drink sector being a major contributor to the UK economy and a driver for a better UK food system
- The key role of the local food and drink industry in creating the landscape and infrastructure for a thriving visitor economy and green tourism.

Strengthening Local Food Identities

There are a variety of different initiatives that can be used to strengthen local food identities and connect consumers with local food and drink. Some examples are:

- **Initiatives that link food and drink to visitor experiences** – this could include farmers' markets, food and drink trails, and food festivals.
- **Buy local campaigns** - online marketing campaigns aimed at encouraging consumers to buy more local produce, conducted at a regional or local level by organisations such as Regional Food Groups, Local Enterprise Partnerships and Local Authorities.
- **Regional or local food accreditation schemes** – creating a certification trademark for high quality, local products to ensure local shops, retail and hospitality stock more of these products.
- **Geographical Indication (GI) schemes** - The UK's Geographical Indication (GI) schemes showcase the unique heritage of our food and drink.

Food, drink and agricultural products with a geographical connection or that are made using a traditional recipe can be registered and protected as a GI. GI protection guarantees a product's characteristics or reputation, authenticity and origin. It protects the product name from misuse or imitation.

If you are a business that would like to apply to the GI schemes or would like some further information, visit: [Protected geographical food and drink names: UK GI schemes - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/protected-geographical-food-and-drink-names)

- **B2B events** – regional stalls at food and drink trade shows can give local businesses a larger platform to showcase their products.

Case Studies

Initiatives that link food and drink to visitor experiences

1. Altrincham Business Improvement District (BID) – Altrincham Market



Transformation of Altrincham Town Centre

Altrincham is a thriving 'Modern Market Town' in Greater Manchester with a rich retail, recreational, night-time economy and a growing residential mix. It has become a gastronomic destination with its award-winning Market at the heart of its vibrant food and drink offer.

However, in 2010 Altrincham hit the headlines for having the most boarded-up shops, pubs, bars and restaurants in the country. A combination of efforts from Trafford Council, local entrepreneurs, the establishment of Altrincham Business Improvement District (BID) in 2016, along with support and investment in businesses, the public realm and infrastructure, has revitalised Altrincham. It is now a destination pulling in visitors from across all of Greater Manchester. Visitor numbers have increased exponentially in the town. In 2018, the town won Champion High Street for England in the Great British High Street Awards. The key to this success was the development of Altrincham Market.

The role of Altrincham Market

The importance of the transformation of Altrincham Market into a thriving street food offering, with a makers market and event space on the side, should not be underestimated. The Market has acted as an anchor institution, seeing other night-time economy businesses such as high-quality bars, pubs with micro-breweries, restaurants and coffee shops establish themselves in the vicinity of the market, both growing off each other.

This independent business community has been carefully managed and supported by the Local Authority and the BID. The BID is a business-led and business-funded organisation that provides additional or improved services over and above those provided by the council. The BID has coordinated events and relationships between local organisations, while the Council has offered loans to businesses to convert old retail units to better suit their needs.

Altrincham is a great demonstration of how embracing the night-time economy and its food and drink businesses can transform the fortunes of a town. In an environment where retail is struggling, where retail-led high streets and town centres are dying away, the night-time economy is more important than ever, and this formerly struggling market town in Greater Manchester, should serve as a local, national and international example of what is possible when the public and private sector work hand-in-hand to support the night-time economy and local food and drink businesses.

2. Shropshire Festivals – Shropshire Tasty Trail



Beth Heath is Director of Fun at Shropshire Festivals. Her events, which include Shrewsbury Food Festival and Shropshire Oktoberfest, all centre around giving a platform to local food and drink businesses.

Following the outbreak of COVID-19 and the restrictions that surrounded it, she launched Shropshire Tasty Trail – an outdoor, socially distanced walk that would take in Shropshire’s stunning landscape with locally sourced food and drink on offer.

The original Shropshire Tasty Trail was due to launch in May 2020, but due to rising COVID-19 cases, it was postponed until May 2021, when the team were able to safely go ahead with the event. It was an undeniable success – the event sold out and 600 happy

trail walkers completed an 8-mile walk through the countryside near Upton Magna. Along the walk, a starter, main and dessert were served in the open air. All washed down with some of the region's finest ales and ciders, with local businesses providing the food on offer.

The ethos for this event is about getting people out into the countryside, getting active, being social, and supporting local food and drink businesses. It's about leaving muddy footprints not carbon footprints, with their low food mile offering.

This April, Shropshire Tasty Trail returns for a two-day event on April 9 and 10 at a new location. This year's walk and eat event will be across a picturesque private estate in Ellesmere, Shropshire. Walkers will follow a route through the estate, which is not usually open to the public. The trail walkers will enjoy pork and beef raised on the farmland they will be walking through – it doesn't get more local than that!

The most difficult element to get right has been securing the route. Finding a route that is the perfect length, with the best views is part of it – securing access is the hard part. Aside from that element, Beth has developed a straightforward event model that is fully adaptable to different rural settings and highly appealing to customers who want to support local food and drink businesses, spend time outdoors and like to keep active.

3. Visit Kent – Experience Development Programme



[Interreg EXPERIENCE](#) aims to extend the tourism season through the development of off-season experiences with an emphasis on overnight stays and sustainability. The project involves multiple partners across six pilot regions in England and France including Kent, Norfolk and Cornwall. Key aims of the project:

- To extend the tourism season and increase visitor spend
- To improve the sustainability of tourism by reducing the social and environmental impacts
- To develop and implement new products and services to attract new visitors

As part of this project, Visit Kent has launched an [Experience Development Programme](#) to help 125 local businesses to develop new experiential off-season tourism products and experiences and take them to market. This includes a range of businesses from existing tourism businesses, such as attractions and activity providers, and also those looking to diversify into tourism, such as artists, food producers and photographers.

Successful businesses have received a package of sector-specific support to develop the product, to ensure it's fit for the audience and launch it to market, including:

- **1 to 1 mentoring** - Specialist consultancy to support the development of a business plan for the launch of the new product and to help overcome barriers.
- **Product testing** - Market testing of the concept with consumers and travel trade providing feedback to further develop your product.
- **Specialist support** - Peer networks and access to experts to help overcome barriers, signpost funding opportunities and improve accessibility.
- **Content development** - Photography and video of the new product and inclusion in inspirational feature content.
- **Consumer marketing** - Inclusion in targeted destination consumer campaigns to market your product to domestic audiences.
- **B2B distribution** - Distribution of the product to the travel trade and corporate groups through established B2B connections and networks.

A number of key challenges were identified through the mentoring stage. As small businesses, time and resource to focus on product development was the biggest challenge. Understanding how best to form effective business partnerships, build financially viable packages, and technical aspects, such as bookability and distribution, were also identified as barriers that Visit Kent have helped businesses to address through specialist support and peer networks.

Businesses have become more resilient through the creation of new revenue streams. By diversifying they have been able to tap into new audiences and have responded to visitor trends around experiences and local produce as a result of COVID-19. For the destination, Visit Kent now have a range of new authentic products to attract visitors which showcase local provenance including foraging, cake baking experiences, mushroom growing workshops, cycling brewery tours, gin and steam train packages, local cooking classes and oyster bed tours.

Buy Local Campaigns

Help Kent Buy Local

In March 2020, [Produced in Kent](#) launched its #HelpKentBuyLocal campaign in support of all local independent food and drink businesses in Kent and Medway – members as well as non-members.

The campaign's aims were two-fold:

- **Boosting sales for the many local independent businesses** working incredibly hard to grow, produce, prepare, sell and deliver food and drink to the Kent community during lockdown.
- **Raising awareness about Buying Local** as a way to support the local economy, protect the countryside, eat healthily and contribute to a greener future, with the aim of establishing a lasting change in buyer behaviour (B2C and B2B).

The campaign consisted of:

- **The www.helpkentbuylocal.co.uk website:** hosting a B2C map, showing customers which local food and drink outlets were still open and/or trading online in their area. All local food and drink businesses could list their services on the site for free.
- Promotion of food and drink businesses involved across **social media** - #helpkentbuylocal.
- **A weekly [Good News Bulletin](#):** sharing positive stories about all the amazing initiatives undertaken by the food and drink sector in Kent.

Impact

Within 6 months of starting the campaign:

- The helpkentbuylocal website had 43,901 sessions and 76,925 page views.
- The Good News bulletin proved hugely popular with 200,000 customers reached.
- Almost 1000 committed customers signed their #CaringCustomer pledge.
- Their Instagram followers rose by 2k, Facebook by 1k.
- More than 100 local, regional and national media pieces on the helpkentbuylocal campaign reached a staggering 5.5million people.
- Produced in Kent obtained funding from SELEP to extend the campaign across Essex and East-Sussex through its Buy Local Southeast project.

Challenges

During the campaign

- **Today's public gets easily 'bored':** How to keep the campaign 'fresh' and the public engaged? Visual content, competitions, clear call to action, creating stories, making it personal.
- **We are preaching to the converted:** How do you reach the consumers that do not follow your social media or subscribe to the newsletter? How do you reach a younger audience?

Going forward

- **How to change customer behaviour in the longer term?** The buy local message must be linked to food education. If one truly wants to be healthy, save the planet and support the local economy, then one must **change their relationship with food**: by buying less, buying seasonal, home cooking and being less wasteful. How do we – businesses, Government, civil society - collectively help the public to successfully make this change?

Regional or Local Food Accreditation Schemes

Produced in Northumberland – Produced in Northumberland Verification scheme

The Produced in Northumberland Verification scheme is run by Northumberland County Council. Its aim is to encourage more businesses to stock more local produce that has a 'Produced in Northumberland' Certification Trademark. A Certification mark is a specific type of trademark which provides a guarantee that the goods or services bearing the mark meet a certain defined standard or possess a particular characteristic.

The key steps to developing a verification scheme:

- **Consulting and engaging with businesses and other stakeholders.** Produced in Northumberland (PIN) considered the views of businesses through several forums at the set-up stage. This engagement has continued through 3 yearly PIN Forum meetings where members attend to discuss ways forward, trading issues and to obtain advice on various issues e.g., grants, PR.
- **Understanding the strong links between food and drink, the hospitality industry and tourism.** Securing buy-in from the hospitality industry to sell and serve local Northumberland food and drink increases the demand for food and drink from local producers and subsequently from farmers, markets and the fishing industry. More demand leads to retained or increased employment and an increase in the local economy.
- **Having a brand that can be trusted and identified.** PIN carefully considered the wording and incorporation of the Northumberland County flag into their logo: Northumberland's flag is one of the oldest and most widely recognised throughout the UK and the wording on the logo speaks for itself i.e., "Produced in Northumberland". Consumers also trust that the food and drink sold under that brand is made within the county and verified by Environmental Health and Trading Standards staff.
- **Having defined Produced in Northumberland criteria.** The criteria were developed following consultation with businesses. Once agreed this was verified and checked by the Intellectual Property Office (IPO).
- **Physical audits of businesses reassure customers.** PIN carry out physical audits at low cost to businesses and can tell customers if a piece of steak has originated from a Northumberland farm. Many schemes are paper-based and lack physical checks.

Produced in Northumberland success stories

The Northumbrian Bakehouse is a small bakery specialising in biscuits. Since changing to new packaging and branding with the PIN logo, the business has seen increased sales. They also supply many delis and retailers selling local food, drink and gifts and produce packs for the hospitality trade.

Glentons Bakery is a medium-sized bakery business. Since joining Produced in Northumberland, Glentons have started to supply some County Council premises e.g., Fire HQ and County Hall and two NHS hospitals within Northumberland.

Promotion at B2B events

This is Cumbria are a collective of dynamic Cumbrian producers and craftspeople formed in 2018 with a passion for producing fine goods. They aim to showcase the very best food, drink and produce from across Cumbria to thousands of key buyers at trade events with a 'big impact' destination trade pavilion.

How did This is Cumbria begin? The seed was sown at the Farm Shop and Deli Show in 2018 when a small number of Cumbrian based food & drink businesses exhibited their products to an audience of 30,000 trade buyers over 3 days. Despite their independent business successes, Lisa from Ginger Bakers and Maria from Hawkshead Relish noticed the gathering crowds at the large regional stands and the idea 'This is Cumbria' was born.

Over the following months, the concept was developed and brought to life by Maria from Hawkshead Relish, Thomas Jardine & Co and The Family Business Network. The pavilion was first launched at a trade show in April 2019 at the 'Farm Shop and Deli Show', with support and sponsorship from Cartmell Shepherd and Enterprise Answers, branding from Eclectic Creative, uniforms from Liberty Workware and print from Printing Plus.

The 'showcase' part of the pavilion has given new and micro-producers, who otherwise would not have been able to afford the costs of participating in the trade show, the chance to exhibit nationally.

If you are interested in finding out more about setting up a regional trade pavilion, please contact Thomas Jardine and Co at: keith@thomasjardineandco.co.uk