

## **A SENSE OF IRELAND**

**30TH September – 6TH October 2018**

### **Appendix From Food Networks Case Study**

Stephen McDonach, Lochaber Environmental Group.

Within my role as environmental development officer I'm tasked with increasing agricultural output within Lochaber.

The 'A Sense of Ireland learning visit' has afforded me a greater understanding of the challenges faced and opportunities food networks can offer to both groups and the wider community.

Witnessing the achievements of the CIC 'Food Hub' in Leitrum and the Tallaght, 'Partas' collective of community ventures has shown the group how the social enterprise model can merge with privately owned entity's to facilitate a sustainable and responsive fundamental for growers, producers and consumers.

We've learned how the creation of sustainable supply chains have enabled communities to develop new tourism destinations that have provided employment and measurable success.

We've also seen how small producers have been able to exploit their ability to change at pace, harvesting fragile resources such as high value Seaweed in a way larger business could not and how distance to market has, been reimagined as a food story and serve as an opportunity to both community's and individuals.

Sandy Fraser, Blane Valley Inn, Loch Lomond

While visiting Ireland with the Ayrshire Chamber we have visited and experienced a vast variety of different businesses.

Each of these have had their own inspiring story of how they have started or survived throughout difficult times. Many of these had been thanks to the local community's efforts, food networks & voluntary work.

Food networks have inspired me and I will be taking this home and trying to start to help and encourage the local community to work together.



Fiona Richmond, Head of Regional Food, Scotland Food & Drink:

A Sense of Ireland learning journey has been an enlightening and stimulating experience in so many ways, and has reinforced my fundamental belief in the power of food networks, however defined, to galvanise communities, grow a region's food and drink economy, foster a positive food culture with pride in the value of local produce and put an area on the map as a food tourism destination.

Key points:

- Collaborate - working together can achieve so much more than working alone
- Always be clear about the purpose and vision of a network and focus on that
- Strong leadership is essential to motivate, inspire and ensure goals are met
- Ride the storm when things get tough - never give up
- Be flexible/adaptable as circumstances change
- Measure success as far as possible
- Work with local and national agencies, link to their relevant strategies and seek advice/backing (funding etc) - but don't be over-reliant on the public sector and be as self-sustaining as possible
- Shout about & celebrate successes
- Partner with other relevant sectors too - heritage, textiles, crafts and others.

Michelle Stevenson, Ayrshire College:

Whilst visiting Ireland I have learnt what a food network is, this isn't something I've come across before and isn't something that is taught or spoken about so I knew very little about food networks.

This trip has shown me how important having a food network can be to a community and how passionate the people in Ireland are about their country and the communities they live in. The impact a food network when set up and running is amazing and really inspiring in what can be achieved and the amount of work and dedication it has from its volunteers.

On returning home I will research how many food networks are within Ayrshire and also if Ayrshire College works with any, if not hopefully share what I've learnt and encourage the college to reach out and make a connection.

I'll pass on what I've learnt to the student's I'd also like to encourage it to be taught within the classroom to raise awareness and let people know that food networks do exist and they need the support of the community and businesses behind them.



Julie Ryan Project Coordinator Forth Environment Link :

Ireland has been a hugely inspiring and humbling experience. It has furthered my belief that people have the power to make positive change within their communities and how more often than not food and drink is the catalyst for such change. Even in times of crisis people can implement positive changes that not only enhance the lives of the local residents but also the wider the community.

What have I seen?

- A chocolate box of local business that all share an innate passion and enthusiasm to make their communities better.
- Through the establishment of local food networks local identities have flourished which are rooted within the cultural heritage of a given place.
- These emergent local identities have led to a new found sense of pride and responsibility to make communities richer, providing a platform for local producers to establish food networks that tell a story and attract both national and international interest.
- Food networks enhance the local economy by providing employment and engaging people in a shared interest that benefits all.

What have I learned?

- People are at the heart of developing and sustaining local food networks.
- More often than not the success of a local food network rests on a shared vision, commitment and sense of social responsibility.
- Innovation and connectivity are two key components that allow food networks to thrive.
- A willingness to cooperate, share and exchange knowledge, skills and assets can complement local food networks.
- By establishing local food networks it allows new routes to market to be established which again facilitate the sustainability of the local economy and provide entrepreneurs with a safe place to try out product ideas, innovate and create.

What will I take away from this experience?

- Every community can have its own local food network no matter how small.
- You are only as good as your last idea, if you don't innovate you will fall behind, If you don't connect you will limit your reach.
- Take risks, stop with the poor mouth and get on with it.
- Build relationships and connect your food network to your locality, this will embed your food network within its natural surroundings and add to the cultural heritage specific to your community.
- Encourage your community to get involved making sure it responds to their needs.
- Passion, passion and more passion! If you're not invested no one else will be.



For me Ireland is an island that connects people to place through linking cultural heritage, food and drink, innovation and destination tourism. In this way Ireland has adopted a holistic approach to tourism providing a rich and meaningful experience for the people living and travelling here. Throughout my time here I have learned just how important local communities are and how they fuel the wider economy complementing each other bringing together a cultural experience which is unlike anything I have had the pleasure of being a part of.

Barbara Wardlaw Fife Farmers Market.

This has been an inspiring journey. Through a severe economic downturn in the country we have seen how enthusiastic passionate individual's through food and drink can change people's livelihoods. Food networking can link and regrow a local community by bringing them all together they can learn and collaborate with each other and go on to grow further.

- Start small
- Look and see what networks you have in your local community as a starting point.
- Network with local Heritage, Cultures and Arts to assist in promotion of your business.
- Fix things yourself! Don't always rely on others, as time can be a restraint.
- Networking with others can lead you to help and advice you may need in all parts of your business.

Farmers markets can network and link food & drink with the local Art, Heritage and Cultures of its region and bring them to markets so enhancing the regular market customer experience. It will educate and re connect many with local history and the new market additions brings with them potential of new customers to the farmers market, it also creates a new attraction for people visiting the area.

