



Making the Most of Local Producers Markets - growing Capacity, Confidence and Quality

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Abstract – A return to sourcing food from local producers is a stated integrated policy framework to develop the sustainable economy of the locality upon which this paper is based. The area examined (North West Wales) is highly designated for landscape protection and typically involves low input, family farms. Thus the development of a “new local food heritage” is a vital aspect of improving the resilience of these rural communities.

The process of establishing a number of local producers markets in key settlements is investigated in terms of the emerging opportunities they afford small scale producers of food and drink locally to both network and develop the capacity of their businesses and to grow their own visions for innovative development. The organisation of the market associations is also investigated and the market’s role as a means of increasing both the social capital and community space of this settlement.

FARMING RESTRUCTURING – DIVERSIFICATION AND ORGANIC PRODUCTION

“Agriculture is worth £150 million to the Welsh economy, with almost 15,000 people employed directly in farming and many more owing their living indirectly to providing goods and services to farms. There is no doubt that farming and food production represents a key strategic industry for Wales”. (Jones, 2013)

This paper examines a range of foods brought to local markets in North West Wales, producers’ reasons for supporting market associations and the broad benefits to their businesses, family and farms. The response of local stake-holders to such associations is investigated, along with the benefits these gatherings generate for the broader rural community.

In the past, the farmers have been strongly incentivised to adopt stewardship focussed practices (Welsh Assembly Government, 2010¹). A new approach was recently outlined which indicates greater support for food **for** Wales, **from** Wales and which integrates agri-environmental practices including Organic transition with local food production:

“We must not waste time on the old fashioned view that we can either have food production or environmental outcomes. The two are inextricably linked and we must have both”. (Davies, 2013)

This paper aims, firstly to investigate some of the issues around the successful implementation of this new direction through the examination of opinions and organisation of a number of already established producers markets. Secondly it broadly examines the contribution these markets make to their settlement hubs and thirdly, considers empirical issues relating to self-definition by food producers of their products as “local”, “organic” or “natural” within environmentally constrained farming systems.

METHOD

Separate surveys of producers and customers were undertaken at a range of local food producers’ markets to identify the motivation for co-operation within market associations. Detailed case studies of local food businesses are presented drawing on qualitative grounded theory and are compared to examples of similar hubs internationally (Nelson, Stroink, 2013). This further explores differentiation of paths of individual business development and decision making/strategies which influence the development of the producers’ markets as emerging local food hubs. The processes of establishing, developing and of governing the organisation of these new markets are also discussed drawing on interviews undertaken with the association members and from participant observation.

FUTURE GROWTH OF PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL FOOD NETWORKS

Based on the results of qualitative analysis from the producers and their customers, products are regularly sought which are locally sourced which is not wholly dependent on whether this food is certified as organic and/or local but substantially associated with customer trust and understanding of producers’ business values and practices. The findings of the surveys reinforce the common attachment of both producers and customers to local heritage and values as demonstrated by substantial and regular spend on food and drink items at the local food hubs investigated.

¹ Hereafter known as WAG



The development and organisation of such hubs face considerable challenges including time constraints and administrative issues which need to be faced if such hubs are to multiply sustainably. Implications of long term funding and other suggestions are drawn from empirical evidence of such initiatives.

"We must source more of our food locally and in season" (One Planet Wales, 2009b, pg 12)

CONCLUSIONS

With tourism accounting for 13.3% of the Welsh economy (National Assembly of Wales, 2011), food tourism is a predicted growth sector (WAG, 2013; 2009). Providing core long –term funding support to enable the revalorisation and expansion of local food hubs, producers' markets, processing and trading systems could contribute substantially to the recovery and resilience of producer communities. Initiating new gastronomic experiences and food heritage traditions could in turn facilitate a vibrant local food economy with adequate security of supply and a wide variety of healthy, seasonal, wholesome food choices for local residents - **and** at a fair price for producers (Kneafsey *et al.*, 2006; Renting *et al.*, 2003).

Welsh Government has a political commitment to sustainable development, (Government of Wales Act, 2006) and has to ensure that this principle is a cross cutting theme for all policies and visions relating to countryside management and farming. Financial constraints exogenous to Wales (e.g. e.U. budget reform; the U.K. Government's Comprehensive Spending Review) may conspire to frustrate these ambitions.

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