



## **“The Moray Firth – Produce to be Proud of” Conference Report**

### **Purpose:**

The purpose of the conference was to explore the potential for adding value to local produce and to bring together a wide range of people involved in the production, distribution and retailing of quality local food and drink from the Moray Firth area, to create an agenda for further development of the sector over the next 10 years.

### **Participants:**

52 people attended the conference, including representatives from fishing and farming industry, food and drink processors and distributors, retailers, restaurateurs, hoteliers, tourism and health promotion, as well as representation from the local authorities and local enterprise companies.

### **Speakers:**

The conference speakers were:

- Gilpin Bradley, West Ross Fisheries
- Prof. Terry Stevens, Stevens Associates
- Alastair Dobson, Taste of Arran
- Christina Ballinger, Somerset Organic Link
- Wynfford James, True Taste of Wales
- Anne Moseley, Seafood Scotland
- Jason Holway, Zenith International
- Jim Mullen, Larder Bytes
- Willie Cameron, Highland Feast

### **Main Conclusions**

The main conclusions from the discussions and workshops were as follows:

- There was broad agreement that the local food produce of the Moray Firth is substantial and has considerably more potential than is currently realised for providing local benefit.
- To deliver this benefit would require a programme of linked actions involving a range of key stakeholders.
- The Moray Firth Partnership could provide an organisational focus for bringing stakeholders together and helping to identify an action agenda. ‘A flag to rally under’.
- The MFP could also offer some immediate opportunities to showcase and network local food and its providers: These are:
  - 1.The Moray Firth Trail (part of the North Sea Trail (Nortrail) initiative), which provides an international platform for attracting visitors and interpreting the coastal heritage, offering the potential to develop a Moray Firth Food Trail;
  - 2.The Moray Firth Flotilla, scheduled to take place in June 2007, with events in 6 ports around the Firth, offering the opportunity to develop local food festivals/ market places.

Key issues to address in further discussion are:

- Establishing networks at a meaningful level and across current boundaries, to address fragmentation of supply and demand, and sectoral and administrative boundaries, addressing each sector as a meaningful group and part of the essential supply chain.
- Providing tangible evidence of benefits to stakeholders from a well developed local food economy
- Supporting local initiatives based on best practice, with tangible outcomes
- Influencing and working with the tourism industry to increase recognition of the potential of local quality produce and to stimulate demand
- Developing branding for local produce, based on a hierarchy: Highland / Moray Firth / Local.
- Providing guidance and messages to the public sector and enterprise networks as to what is required by the local producers and supply chain to achieve these objectives.
- There is a need to find a common agenda and stick with it.

For the full notes of the workshop discussion please see Appendix 1.

### **Press and PR**

The Conference attracted news coverage from STV and local radio, with a number of key speakers and the Moray Firth Partnership Manager, Vanessa Halhead, being interviewed. The news item was aired on the 6 o'clock news programme.

### **Conclusion**

The conference demonstrated, through wide experience, that local food sells principally on the message of a good, clean, beautiful environment, and secondly on information about the producer/ community from which it comes.

Delegates revealed a clear need and wish for this initiative to be taken further and the Partnership has agreed to hold a follow up meeting with a small number of key players in the near future.

### **Next steps**

The Moray Firth Partnership will be organising a follow-up meeting during March 2007, with some key people, to discuss the process for taking the conference recommendations forward.

### **Conference funders**

The Partnership gratefully acknowledges funding support from:



HIGHLAND MARINE RESOURCES AND COMMUNITIES SCHEME

## **Appendix 1 Workshop Feedback**

### **Workshop 1 – ‘Working Together’ - led by Christina Ballinger of Somerset Organic Link**

What is happening currently?

- Increasing interest in good local food
- Food Forums – Grampian and Highlands and Islands
- Farmers markets/ home delivery
- Food links organisations
- Organic produce networking
- Slow Food network
- HIE and Scottish Enterprise Grampian initiatives

What are the barriers to collaboration?

- Lack of time and money for businesses to collaborate
- Lack of sustainable distribution networks and infrastructure
- Cultural reticence and lack of confidence
- Administrative and political boundaries
- Many producers and businesses are too hidden
- Poor links between health promotion and business
- Poor links between the tourism industry and local producers
- Financial support is poorly targeted re. support to sustainable, healthy produce
- HIE and SEG need to work more effectively together

What is needed?

- Increase availability and demand for local, organic and sustainably produced food
- Decrease food miles
- Education through good examples
- Evidence of tangible business benefits
- Food businesses to realise they are the key to a healthy community
- Improve networks across barriers
- Improve links between business and health promotion
- Improve packaging and branding to back up sustainability messages
- Facilitation to bring players together – produce, health, retail, catering, tourism
- Bring the existing lead bodies together around the Moray Firth – HIE/ SEG/ Food Forums
- Consider issues of geographical scale – Highland/ Moray Firth/ local
- Build on existing networks and events and allow for organic growth over time

Action agenda:

- Build on the Moray Firth Trail and seek EU funding to develop a Moray Firth Food Trail
- Build on the Moray Firth Flotilla and provide food events at all six ports – including schools events (assistance offered from group members – also suggested links with Buckie Initiative/ Highland Council school catering service/ Food Forums/ health promotion/ local producers)
- Use existing organisations to help ( Food Forums/ Organic Link/ Slow Food/ Highlands and Islands Local Food Network)
- Seek commercial driver / business champions

## **Workshop 2 - 'Local Initiatives' - led by Jim Mullen of Larder Bytes**

The workshop concentrated on the creation of regional networks of suppliers working together to service a common market. The Larder Bytes initiative was discussed in detail, including how the supply chain software and the programme works, stock management and how the business was established.

### **Issues**

Costing:

- the seller sets the price and Larder Bytes charges 2.5% commission to the last link in the supply chain

Comparison:

- there no other models like this operating in the UK. Larder Bytes operates from Fife and is in the process of establishing a new venture in Cairngorm

Transport:

- home delivery service is in the pipeline

Support:

- Larder Bytes experienced lack of public sector support, not just the financial but advisory role.
- Although bodies contacted thought it was a good idea, there was no support and they found there to be problems between the two sectors interfacing.
- A suggestion was made to concentrate on one regional product to attract public funding and support for a new scheme.

Product:

- the software is built to handle the amateur supplier and end user
- The programme and larder bytes concept would be easily transferable to the Moray Firth.
- The suppliers are responsible for quality assurance. As a producer there is no escaping the guarantee of the product.
- The contract is between the supplier and customer throughout the chain.

### **Conclusions**

- Creates a brand identity that everyone can relate to " it doesn't mean you don't supply anything else, just the one that gets talked about is the one the area is famous for".
- The diversity of product and geography of the Moray Firth makes it a 'match made in heaven' with the Larder Bites programme.
- Collaboration – we all have a say.

## **Workshop 3 - 'Marketing' - led by Yvonne Crook of View Marketing**

During the plenary session, Yvonne Crook briefly presented the marketing ideas / issues which would be relevant for all workshop groups. The Marketing workshop then looked in more detail at some of the main issues.

### **The Moray Firth as a brand ?**

Delegates considered that:

- There had to be an overarching brand for the wider area within which a Moray Firth brand could sit. After some discussion, it was felt that "Highlands" might be best, tying in with a common perception that the Highlands starts north of Stirling.
- Using a banner such as "Best of the Highlands" might be appropriate, or some other identifier to show the uniqueness / main selling points of the area.
- The Moray Firth as an area is not widely recognised, and many think only of the inner MF area (unlike examples such as Arran or Orkney). Some felt it would be counter productive to start a branding exercise with the need to educate consumers merely in order to define the area. However, increasing customer knowledge about the Moray Firth area would be part of the "selling" process.
- The Moray Firth area as a main brand would be too limiting for many producers, and would be more suited to fisheries produce for example.
- Historically the Highlands was not renowned for good food and there was a limited range of produce , e.g. a lack of good local vegetables.

### **Local Audience**

- Within the Moray Firth area, there is a large resident population of around 260,000 which is a significant market in itself. There is scope for the Moray Firth as a local brand, within the hierarchy of the overarching "Highlands" brand.
- Breaking areas down into even smaller "local" areas would still be required to foster local connections and infrastructure.
- Establishing local and wider connections across the supply chain was seen by some as a more pressing need than for a branding exercise.
- The list identified by Yvonne and shown in the presentation included: Local residents, Visitors, Health Conscious People, Young People, Business People, Hoteliers / Restaurateurs, Retailers
- Other potential audiences / consumers suggested by delegates included:-
- Local Authorities - eg The Highland Council alone has 11704 staff

### **Distribution**

- Distribution of goods within the Highlands was seen as problematic by all those present. Having an IV postcode can add significantly to delivery times, although distances may not be greater.
- Members of the Highlands & Islands Food Forum have previously raised this issue, but not come up with any solutions. Need to identify why these previous initiatives failed.
- Although some local haulage/ carrier businesses are experiencing rapid growth, there is still a major underlying distribution network problem and concerns.
- Some funding might be useful as pump priming to enhance a distribution network, but ultimately this has to be commercially viable to be sustainable.
- Urgent cross sector collaboration is required to help identify the way forward.
- HIE is looking at reviewing the distribution network, but needs private sector input.
- Producers were therefore urged to provide input to HIE as to what they feel is required.
- Groups of producers (whether from a local area, or industry sector) should get together to create an agenda / format for what they see is required to improve the distribution network. This can then be presented to agencies with a request for help to implement. A combined voice and well presented case will carry more weight with the agencies.

## **The Market**

- Question by Gilpin Bradley: "Should we pursue, using legislation, planning conditions or similar means, to require a clearer focus on local foods? (eg to stipulate as a planning condition for major retail outlets etc that they make adequate provision to stock and supply local produce)"
- Other ongoing initiatives, such as "Eat Scotland" mentioned
- It is much easier and cheaper for small local producers to supply locally to small outlets, than to deliver to major retailers (even if this was feasible in terms of the scale of their production)
- There is resistance by local outlets, hotels, restaurants etc. to buying local produce because they believe it will be more expensive.
- Need to think through how we bring producers and consumers together. (Example given of recent staged event in Dingwall when the celebrity chef Nick Nairn was brought in to demonstrate using local produce. Local schoolchildren and hospitality/ accommodation providers were invited to attend. Local producers considered the main focus of the "consumers" was on meeting Nick Nairn, rather than the intended result of raising the profile of local food and the local producers who were in attendance.)
- Tourism Agencies and Food Producers need to talk together to create a shared agenda.
- Consultations as part of The Highlands and Islands Food and Drink Strategy identified a lack of awareness across agencies of the local food sector.
- Need to identify proactive individuals (movers and shakers) who can nurture connections and move things forward.
- The Year of Highland Culture 2007 was seen as a good opportunity to promote Highland food, but it was felt more should be done within the events planned to focus on local food.
- One planned event was the Highland Feast. Some delegates felt the timing of this now regular annual event was not right - October was not an ideal month being outwith the main tourist season.

## **Summary of main points**

There were three main issues to be considered by any group taking forward an agenda to promote produce from the Moray Firth :-

1. the Moray Firth as a brand could only work within the context / hierarchy of a wider "Highlands" or "Scottish" identity
2. There are significant problems within the Highlands distribution network to be resolved, with a perceived need for the private sector to come together to agree a joint way forward which can then be presented to the main agencies as an agenda / format to obtain necessary assistance
3. There is a clear need for businesses and organisations across the food supply chain, and for agencies including those involved in the tourism / destination marketing to communicate more effectively, to try to create a shared agenda for change.