

## Devon County Council

### Strategy for public procurement, Sept 08

#### Executive summary

##### The brief and key findings

This study set out to identify how public sector organisations could procure more locally produced food and drink in Devon. The focus was on catering services in schools, hospitals, and care homes, and also considering prison, army and police services. The research shows that Devon is ahead of the game nationally, with an excellent County Council catering service geared to sustainable food sourcing for schools and other sectors. A range of District Council and private sector initiatives are also beginning to find solutions to distribution of local produce from smaller producers. Many public sector catering managers, such as in hospital Trusts, are very positive in seeking to develop local and sustainable sourcing strategies. However, despite this positive overview, there remain distinct barriers to growth in the sector.

From the demand perspective, there remains in some quarters a lack of clear strategy to pursue a sustainable food policy. Where there is a desire to do so, there may be a lack of information about how and where to source local produce, and where the effort is made, it can involve much more work for the catering teams. In schools, new nutritional requirements are making the provision of school meals more complex, and food and staff costs make it increasingly difficult to take independent action on catering provision. Many contracts for public sector supplies have recently been let, which allows little room for innovation for several years.

From the supply side, smaller producer can still find it difficult to meet the requirements of public sector buyers in terms of accreditations or in quality and consistency of supply. This is also true in respect of opportunities to operate as downstream suppliers to delivered wholesale or food service businesses, who are in a better position to tender for large contracts. Distribution of small quantities of produce is still very inefficient, both in terms of cost or producer's time, or fuel used per kg of food transported. Collaboration on delivery or marketing remains largely undeveloped.

Without question, local supply systems can generate significant benefits to the local economy, safeguard rural jobs and communities, and if integrated into careful programmes of land management and waste minimisation, can make significant impacts on reducing carbon emissions.

## **Key recommendations**

The study concluded with a number of action areas which seek to address the issues which the County faces. These include:

- better information systems to capture, keep updated and communicate data on local suppliers and produce available
- online ordering using paperless systems, integrated with local distribution solutions
- projects linking schools with hospitals or other buyers, to collaborate on supply contracts, and potentially on meal production and distribution
- linking small producers with larger suppliers such as the delivered wholesalers and food service operators
- enabling joint delivery and marketing at the micro level, through IT solutions
- help for schools wishing to cater independently, especially in the context of new nutritional requirements
- building skills for catering managers and kitchen staff in understanding sustainable food provision, and cooking from seasonal local fresh ingredients
- van sharing systems to improve efficiencies in distribution, such as helping smaller producers fill remaining space in other vehicle movements, helping producers work together to fill a pallet or find ways to fill vans on the backhaul.