

Local Products and Village Shops

Prepared for the Countryside Agency
by f3 – the local food consultants

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Introduction

Research by the FLAIR¹ project into the current state of the local food sector and its support needs, as well as by CPRE on the role of local shops and FoE (NI) on the scale of local products sold through independent retailers, raised issues about the social impact of different systems of retail. As a result it became apparent that more research was required to develop a better understanding of the social as well as environmental benefits of local product production and marketing. Many of these potential benefits can be best investigated at the level of market towns and villages through simple research and case studies, and so f3 – the local food consultants – was commissioned by the Vital Villages and Eat the View teams of the Countryside Agency to undertake an assessment into the contribution of local products to the sustaining of rural services, the result of which could be disseminated through the Eat the View and Vital Villages websites, Coastal and Market Towns Learning Network, and the Local Food Works website, as well as informing the Vital Villages retail consultant network.

The purpose of the case studies is to inform policy makers and practitioners, and so a range of examples have been chosen which describe good practice and highlight social impacts of local product marketing in village shops and small market towns. We have also tried to reflect regional diversity by drawing our chosen studies from across the country; one in the North, three in Yorkshire and the Midlands, one in the East and four in the South of England. The villages and towns chosen also vary in terms of degrees of affluence, rural isolation and levels of attraction to tourists. There is also a balance between community owned and independent enterprises.

After an initial literature review to determine the areas most in need of further research, a questionnaire was drawn up that posed key questions about the key economic, social and environmental factors in setting up and running an enterprise with an emphasis on local product marketing. This questionnaire formed the basis for discussion with the chosen enterprises, the results of which were written up as case studies, which are presented in Section Two. The analysis in Section One draws out the key points from the case studies, and presents the main success factors, as well as the most common areas of difficulty facing the enterprises and offers possible solutions. It is hoped that this section will prove useful and informative to practitioners, policymakers and advisors.

Finally, Section Three presents a brief summary of other activity in the country – and offers up snapshots of enterprises that are exploring the potential of the local food sector in innovative ways.

¹ Food and Local Agriculture Information Resource, sponsored by DEFRA and Shell Better Britain

Section One Analysis

Key Facts

Background

- The percentage of local products stocked ranges from 15-25%, with some stores not sure.
- The main local items are fruit and vegetables, dairy (cheese, butter, cream, yoghurt and milk), eggs and meat, but many stores stock other local produce such as honey, preserves, bacon, home-baked goods, and cards. High Street Organics also displays and sells locally made arts and crafts.
- The customer base of most stores is predominantly regulars, from the village and surrounding areas, with those in tourist areas attracting seasonal tourists.
- The shops in their current states have been going for 6 months to 9 years, with the average being just under 2 years.

Economic

- Half the shops are community-owned; the other half independent. All of the community owned shops received start-up grants, loans and advice, mainly from the Countryside Agency and ViRSA, as well as capital from members. None of the independent shops received any financial help or advice, other than from their banks.
- Annual turnovers range from £60,000 to £1.2 million, with profit margins ranging from 18-30% (where known). The median turnover (where reported) is £120,000. Although it is not easy, all the shops report growth and sustainability.
- Three of the big four banks are represented, with the shops banking respectively with NatWest (4), Girobank (2), Lloyds TSB, HSBC and the Post Office. NatWest received praise for start-up support, as did Lloyds TSB with their business route maps.

Social/Community

- All the shops offer additional services; including one or more of: fax, photocopying, notice boards, transport information, and free delivery. Less common additional services are: post office, Internet connection, prescription collection, laundry/dry-cleaning and chimney sweeping!
- All shops report a strong sense of community – often being the hub of the village in terms of meeting place and information point. This community spirit is cemented by social occasions supported by the shop (providing the food at cost) – this applied equally to the independent shops.
- The shops are acting as pathways to employment – locally sourced employment is being provided to between 2 and 15 people. All the shops offer flexible hours and “negotiation”.
- Specialist insurance is obtained from outside insurers in the majority of cases; but all other service contracts – cleaning, accounting, maintenance and legal – are local where possible, although to reduce costs cleaning and book-keeping are sometimes in-house.

Environmental

- Reduced packaging: most fruit and vegetables are sold as loose produce, and the local products often have minimal packaging. Lack of local butchering facilities means that even shops that have the refrigeration to sell local fresh meat often can't supply it, and those without refrigeration have to sell it vac-packed.
- Reduced food miles: the increasing percentage of local products stocked is reducing the distance the food has travelled to point of sale.

- Reduced transport: the local employees are able to walk or travel minimal distances to work, where the alternative would possibly be towns many miles away. More importantly, the delivery service (where offered) uses a small van, or in one case a wheelbarrow, and saves multiple car journeys. Those doing their main shop at the local store are also saving car journeys to supermarkets, often many miles away. Increased use of local suppliers, with small to medium sized delivery vehicles, also means less dependence on wholesalers with large articulated lorries.

Areas of success

The main point to note is that all of the shops reported sustainability and growth. The community owned shops would have been unable to get off the ground without advice (primarily from ViRSA) and funding from the Countryside Agency's Vital Villages programme. Therefore it is vital that support and funding continues to be made available to villages considering a similar venture to save their shop. Initially shops found sourcing locally difficult, but over the last couple of years the profile of the local food sector has increased, leading to more press coverage (either of the shops or of local suppliers) and this has made it easier not only for the shops to find local suppliers, but also for producers to find outlets. The increased number of umbrella organisations promoting local food, e.g. North West Fine Foods, has also made the link between producer and retailer easier.

Some of the biggest contributing factors to a shop's success are: home delivery, a unique selling point, rapid response to changes in consumer needs (keeping up with trends), experienced staff, the availability of good advice, and of course, enthusiasm and commitment. In tourist areas it is important to market local produce in an attractive and unique way – perhaps with village photos and sketches on labels – so that the produce can double as souvenirs and gifts. Other marketing ideas include: a Christmas ordering service, adverts and inserts in local papers and school magazines, promotion at village events, links with local co-operatives, write-ups in tourist brochures and other press, and leaflet drops to the houses in the village shop catchment area.

Where local produce has a story to tell, e.g. the salt marsh lamb (see Cartmel Village Shop case study), or the producer is known to the consumer (see Harbertonford PO and Stores case study), it is important to make the most of the link in promoting the product – all the shops report consumers' interest in the origin of their food and where a link can be made to the landscape the interest is increased. This is borne out by the success of farmers' markets, where the ability to discuss the origin and production methods of food purchased is often cited as a key attraction.

Potential areas of difficulty and possible solutions

All of the shops reported a desire to source locally where possible and practical, but nearly all reported difficulties in finding local suppliers. The main barriers are:

- High search costs involved in seeking out local suppliers;
- Shortage of local suppliers, or lack of variety of local products available;
- Logistics – quantity of goods required (either too high for a small grower, or too small for large established farms supplying supermarkets), and collection arrangements;
- Lack of butchering facilities leading to a reduced supply of local meat. Many farmers would welcome a co-operative abattoir, but do not know how to go about getting funding and advice.

Cost of local goods (often perceived as higher) was not mentioned as a factor. All of the shops said that they would give serious consideration to any local product presented to them for sale. Therefore the message is that the suppliers/producers themselves need to be proactive. A couple of the shops said that following local or national publicity (awards, articles in newspapers etc.) they had been approached by suppliers. Three of the shops are benefiting from access to growers' co-operatives and believe that this is the way forward. Those without access to co-ops agree that this is a solution to logistical problems

of quantity and collection, and would welcome local co-operatives. Therefore, funding and advice for the setting up of co-operatives is an area that could have widespread impact.

Another difficulty faced by the shops is the attraction of customers. The shops situated in isolated villages with no other general store and an older population have a strong local customer base, for whom they are the main source of provisions. However, where access to supermarkets is available (whether by car or public transport) customers need to be attracted by other services/products. This is where Unique Selling Points (USP) come in. All the shops reporting success had made themselves attractive by offering something different or special. The home-baked goods were a big drawcard for one shop, organic produce in another. The wholefood shop stocking alternative medicine is targeting a growing market – the health-conscious customer. Award winning sausages, “to die for” salads, local ciders and of course the world famous Cartmel Sticky Toffee Pudding are all USPs that are succeeding for our shops. Shop layout is also important and many shops are designing the interior to reflect their aims – light, airy and contemporary in one case, “like an old-fashioned village shop” in another. Loans and grants for expensive equipment such as refrigeration, delivery vehicles and kitchen items can help shops introduce new ranges and services to attract customers. Marketing advice would also be welcomed.

The two other key difficulties mentioned by the shops are: getting the right staff, and maintaining the interest and commitment of the community. All said that there is no substitute for experience, not even lashings of enthusiasm, so where possible community owned shops should try to appoint an experienced paid shop manager. Also, the amount of hard work involved in setting up and running a shop is often under-estimated, and where independent owners are prepared to make this commitment for personal long-term gain, it is harder to persuade community members with their own families to put in the same effort. Also, some of the shops reported that although members had supported the concept sufficiently to put their own money in they did not necessarily follow this up with support of the shop as customers.

Conclusion

The enthusiasm for local products, both from customers and shopkeepers, is clear, but in some cases the difficulties in sourcing locally prevent the percentage of stock sourced locally rising above the average 15%-20% towards the desired 30-50%. The link between the landscape and products sold – for example, traditional breeds of animal, etc. – does not seem to be being made; and in fact the majority of shopkeepers struggled with the questions relating to landscape. However, where a link was being made, in Cumbria with the salt marsh lamb (see Cartmel Village Shop case study), the shopkeeper was sure that it was enhancing the popularity of the product with the consumer. It appears that more support and advice is needed in this area.

What did emerge strongly from this research is that support, advice and grants are essential for the majority of shops. The few independent shops that are succeeding without any help have done so with extremely experienced shopkeepers at the helm, and by researching their market before entering, in order to be providing a needed service. It is also clear that there is a lot of uncertainty about the type of support available, particularly for the producers, and they would welcome the advice coming to them, rather than them having to find it. Co-operatives, distribution networks and local communal butchering facilities were all initiatives that were favourably received as potential solutions to local sourcing difficulties.

Village shops, particularly in rural isolated areas with older populations, provide an invaluable service to the community in terms of information, a social meeting place, provisions, banking and response to individual requests, which one wouldn't find in any supermarket or town store, as well as offering pathways to employment. With the right staff and attitude, together with financial support and plenty of advice it can also be a profitable venture. Local sourcing widens the size of community benefiting, as well as increasing the profile of goods particular to an area – this has a positive effect on tourism, as well as promoting local pride.

Section Two **Case Studies**

Case Study: Cartmel Village Shop, Cumbria



Summary

Cartmel Village Shop is a privately owned specialist delicatessen and manufacturer of sticky toffee pudding. Taking into account the puddings, which are also available by mail order, approximately 50% of their stock is locally produced, including: Cartmel Valley smoked salmon, trout, venison etc., Woodalls bacon, Penrith fudge, Cumberland sausages, Cumbrian farmhouse cheeses, relish, Hill Station ice-cream for grown-ups, Quiggins Kendal mint cake, liqueurs, local beers and damson gin. They have a mixed clientele of locals and tourists (including holiday regulars and day trippers). Many of the customers have read about them, and in particular the sticky toffee pudding, in the national press and are keen to try their produce. Since a revamp of the premises last January they have increased their range and concentrated on being more of a specialist store. They are a member of the Guild of Fine Food Retailers, North West Fine Foods, and the Federation of Small Businesses, and have won Gold in the Great Taste Awards, for their sticky toffee pudding and sticky toffee sauce.

History

The Johns' family sold their restaurant in 1989 and bought Cartmel Village Shop. In those days it was a Post Office and General Store, but they found this was not viable, due to the location of supermarkets a fifteen minute drive away. Due to the success of their homemade produce, in particular the sticky toffee pudding, they decided to cut out supermarket items and concentrate their efforts on that and other specialist items that could not be bought elsewhere in order to develop a USP (unique selling point). The puddings were so successful that they expanded to mail order, and subsequently built a kitchen in the grounds of their house and took on many more local staff. It is a genuine family business, with their son, daughter and son-in-law all involved.

Impact on rural community

Economic

The Johns did not receive any advice or financial help when they started in 1989, possibly because less was available then. At first they found it very difficult to make a living, and they feel certain that they would have had failed if they hadn't developed the sticky toffee pudding side of the business. Another contributor to their success is their collaboration with other local suppliers/retailers. They deliver their puddings to outlets around the lakes, and at the same time collect other producers' items for delivery in the same area. Equally, other producers, for example Woodalls, collect their puddings for delivery elsewhere when they deliver their bacon. They don't find sourcing stock difficult, with the help of an excellent shop manageress – the International Food Exhibition is a key source, and for local foods they use Henrietta Green's Food Lovers Guide and North West Fine Foods. They also keep an eye out in

other shops to see what is selling. Including the pudding mail order, the shop's turnover was £880,000 last financial year, and £1.2 million this year. They only sell their puddings in one outlet in each town, and are loyal to their small Northern retailers, by not supplying to supermarkets. However, in order to break into the South East, they decided to supply to Waitrose, as well as Fortnum and Mason, Selfridges and Harvey Nichols, who do not have outlets in the North. They have banked with the same bank from the beginning, and have been satisfied with their business service, as well as feeling that you are better off with a bank that knows your track record.

Social/Community

The shop also offers transport information and timetables, and tries to be as helpful as possible with all queries and requests. Their accountants are based in Kendal, their solicitors in Barrow-in-Furnace and their insurers in Lancaster, and they have a deliberate policy of using local contractors. Their sticky toffee pudding success has led to expansion and refurbishment, which has benefited local architects, builders etc. The shop and kitchen provide locally-sourced employment with flexible hours for over 20 staff. It is clear that in a small village the success of the sticky toffee pudding business has provided many exciting job opportunities for locals who would have struggled to find local employment. There are also not too many workplaces where the flexible hours include the option to work through the night in order to avoid working during the day surrounded by women, as is the case for one male pudding maker! The shop responds to the needs of the community by meeting food requests where possible, for example recently introducing diabetic ice-cream in response to one customer request. They have also increased their range of quiches and breads to satisfy demand. The annual Christmas treat for all their staff is a meal for them and their partners at a local restaurant – this is taken at a quiet time in November or January to boost the restaurant's takings.

Their sticky toffee pudding success has led to expansion and refurbishment...



Environmental

Two of the staff live 15 miles away, but the rest live within 2-3 miles. The delivery service is carried out 4 days a week using 3 diesel Peugeot vans. There is hardly any product wastage – any “squiffy” puddings are taken home by the staff. The puddings are sold in foil containers with a simple cardboard sleeve – no plastic packaging. Several of the shop products are delivered in large containers and bagged up on the premises – these include loose toffee, chocolate, olives, stuffed vine leaves and peppers. The rural landscape is reflected in some local products – for example sheep bred on the Cumbrian salt marshes that are washed over by the estuary tide have a unique taste. This link between the landscape and the lamb flavour is a marketing tool used by the butcher in nearby Grange-over-Sands, and enhances the tourist attraction of the region.

The Future

The owners of the Cartmel Village Shop feel certain that the popularity of the sticky toffee puddings assures the shop's future. They have plans to expand still further, and hope to build a bigger kitchen and storage facilities on a piece of land 2 miles away, if their planning application is successful. Co-owner Jean Johns is convinced that local products are attractive to customers and do make a difference. For their puddings, which are the secret of their success, they use all the best ingredients, local where possible, and don't cut any corners. Her advice to anyone wanting to make a success of a similar venture is to remember that "whatever you put in, you get out" – that is, "good quality ingredients make a product taste nicer".

Conclusion

The village of Cartmel is designated a sparse ward, with a population density of less than 0.6 per hectare. It has fewer than 2000 residents. It is, therefore, not the most likely site of a thriving global business that has kept its roots and structure firmly local. However, the fact that the owners are committed to the village and its people means that as the business continues to grow, the village will continue to benefit and thrive. This makes Cartmel Village Shop a truly inspirational example of local products sustaining rural communities.



***...the village will
continue to benefit
and thrive.***

Contact Details

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Case Study: Castleton Village Shop, N Yorks



Summary

Castleton Village Shop is a newsagent and general village store, serving the village of Castleton in the Peak District National Park. As well as newspapers and magazines it sells fresh fruit and vegetables; whole/health/organic foods (SUMA); confectionery; specialist/delicatessen foods; herbs and spices; Ecover; birthday cards, gifts (e.g. candles) pet foods; drinks; ice-cream; seasonal toys; stationery; and basic DIY products. All the organic vegetables (approximately a third of total vegetables) are local, as well as the bread, preserves, honey & sausages. The bacon, cheese and soups come from Yorkshire. The customer base is mainly local, but the catchment area is getting wider as word gets about that they stock organic produce and Ecover. They have only been open since September 2002, so are only just starting to get tourists in. The tourists want produce that they can take home branded from the village, so they are working on increasing that. They are making enquiries to become members of the Organic Farmers & Growers Association, but as it is expensive there needs to be a benefit in becoming accredited. They are also looking at starting a box scheme but need to find out whether it would make a difference to customers if they are accredited or not. Despite their short history they won the YIGA (Yorkshire Independent Grocers Association) local newsagent of the year award for 2003.

History

Castleton Village Shop was established in September 2002, and is family owned and run (husband and wife team of Nick and Zoë Hood). The previous owner concentrated on wholesale trade and wasn't interested in local produce due to inconsistent supply; however, the current owners are concentrating on organic/wholefood/speciality and local produce. They have doubled the stock range since they took over; for example they have increased the types of flour stocked from 2 to 18, made by a local miller (Yorkshire). They are also undergoing a complete redecoration of the shop to encourage new customers to browse. As the shop is a traditional building, more than a hundred years old, they are trying to restore its old image.

Impact on rural community

Economic

Castleton Village Shop did not receive any start-up grant or loan. It has not completed one year's turnover yet, but so far is averaging £10-12,000/month, which extrapolates to £120-£144,000 per annum. It is sited in a village with an approximate population of 200, and yet had made 620 sales in the last 2 days. Although the average sale is still low more people are doing bigger shops with them. They chose to bank with NatWest as they have a branch in the village. The organic vegetables are sourced directly from a local farmer, but the other organic produce comes from a local wholesaler (who in turn sources

locally where possible). They also purchase from a local wholesale market. Suma and Juniper supply the wholefoods, and the specialist cards are locally made. They have found it difficult to source locally – “the problem is getting the word out”. Also, for example, the meat needs to be vac-packed so a local producer would need to have butchering facilities. However they are prepared to make the effort to source locally and have recently had an article in the local paper expressing their interest in local producers.

Social/Community

The shop is currently organising fax facilities, and looking into laundry/dry cleaning. It provides message boards and local transport information. They also make deliveries to local pubs and clubs. The shop provides locally-sourced employment for 1 full-time owner/manager, 1 year-round part-timer and 1 occasional helper. They do their own bookkeeping, get insurance at a discount through the National Federation of Newsagents, and use a local window cleaner and family joiner/electrician. The shop responds to the needs of the community – they will attempt to get anything asked for, however specific. Their motto is “if you don’t see anything, just ask”. The shop has the full backing of the Parish Council, which aims to support local businesses and local producers. It has also offered to support their application for a grant from the Countryside Agency’s Vital Villages programme to buy a new van to set up a mobile shop to visit communities that are without a shop.

Environmental

The owner/manager lives in the village. The local delivery service makes use of a small second-hand Mitsubishi van. Wastage is 5-7%, mainly salad ingredients, and in winter it was less. The organic produce has to be packaged, but it is mostly biodegradable packaging, with some nylon nets (which local vegetable growers take back to re-use). The meat has to be vac-packed as they cannot afford separate refrigeration, and this therefore limits the amount of local meat they are able to sell. The rural landscape has remained one of family run beef and dairy farms; therefore they are ideally placed to benefit from a local communal butchering facility. The Parish Council is in full support of the development of such a facility and is acting as a go-between for the farmers in making their needs heard by the relevant grant awarding bodies. At the next Parish meeting they will discuss if it is something they wish to progress. The farmers who do sell their meat locally sell it as fresh meat to customers who collect it from them, or receive delivery direct from the farmer.

The Future

The owner of the Castleton Village Shop, Nick Hood, believes that, having got through the winter, the business is sustainable and gradually increasing. He is considering converting a takeaway to do home delivery of home-made organic pizzas. If they go down that route they will need to become accredited and classified as a producer. If they are successful in their application for a grant towards a van they will be able to commence the mobile shop.

Comments, advice to others and conclusion

“The customer means more from a business point of view and a personal one.”

“It never used to be a shop for browsing – but now it is because there is an interesting range of produce, plenty of choice e.g. 14 types of teas & coffees.”

“Give coffee away – I always have a percolator on the go as I’m a coffee junkie! Lots of people come to chat.”

“One woman, lives on the council estate, ‘new age’ – she was on the verge of moving away, but the change in the shop meant she stayed. It has better ‘vibes’, stocks the type of food she wants. Made a difference to her life.”

“People come in and say thank you, we really like what you’ve done ... simple things. That’s what we’re here for. We make a living, and are becoming integrated into the community. For us it’s a way of life”

Last Christmas they did a leaflet drop in the newspapers and provided shopping lists for Christmas – customers dropped their list in on their way to work in Teeside and either collected the order on the way home, or it was delivered. This saved being totally congested just before Christmas and proved successful.

Castleton Village Shop is totally committed to local sourcing, and as such is providing a valuable boost to the local community. In the words of Peter Brant, from the Yorkshire Independent Grocers Association, they have “gone to town” sourcing local produce, and this commitment helped them to win Best Local Newsagent award.

“...tourists want produce that they can take home branded from the village.”



Contact Details

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Case Study: Gillamoor Village Shop, N Yorks



Summary

Gillamoor village shop is a newsagent and general store, serving the village of Gillamoor, North Yorkshire. As much as possible of their stock is local, including: bread, milk, cakes, preserves, fresh fruit juices, pies, pasties, cheese, yogurt, and hand made greeting cards. They also stock honey, preserves & beers – only sold very locally; in fact they are the only outlet for the preserves (made by Josephine Slater). For six months of the year the customer base is 90% local regulars, and in the remaining six months (the tourist season) it is 60% local and 40% tourists. They receive orders from tourists for the local honey, beer and preserves. The catchment area is the village and a couple of dales within a five mile radius. They have just received the YIGA (Yorkshire Independent Grocers Association) award for best village shop in Yorkshire. They have also been nominated for the Eat Local Scheme. What makes them different is that they are a new village shop, the original village shop having closed in 1972.

History

The village shop was established in 2000, by owner/manager Graham Slater and his wife Josephine, after agreement from the local planning authority that he would start by selling the stock of second-hand books that he had built up over the years and would reinvest the money in the shop. In the meantime it was a very good opportunity to find out from the locals, when they came in for books, what they wanted from a village shop. In 9 months he was ready to open as a village shop. Now he sells books in dry weather (puts them outside) and, in response to customer demand also sells bulk animal feed, off licence goods, and seaweed (4 different sorts). Since it started it has increased the quantity of products stocked, in particular local products, and fair trade goods. Initially they set out to find local producers, but now their reputation leads local suppliers/producers to them.

Impact on rural community

Economic

The shop did not receive any grant or start-up loan, and Graham Slater believes that it is important to be able to tell from early on if the business is going to be sustainable and it is easier to get a true picture without grants. The turnover last year was £80,000 with profit margin of 18-20%, which is similar to most

village shops. First year turnover was very low, and then they achieved 37% growth in the second year and 77% in the third. It is sited in a small village with an approximate population of 100, and also serves the neighbouring village of Farndale (80 houses) and the next village (60 houses). The local products come from all separate local suppliers/producers: the vegetables come from 500yds away; bacon, meat & ham – 6 miles; honey – 18 miles, but the hives are 3 miles away; eggs from neighbouring Farndale; and cakes, pies – 3 miles; Cromton Brewery, providing local beer, is 5 miles away. Good recommendations for local suppliers have come from the Environmental Health Service. They've had one failure with local ice-cream which was let down by its packaging. In total the supply chain extends to 17 local producers and 3 major wholesalers. They bank with NatWest who have a local branch in Kirby.

Four village shops locally have closed. Reasons include: retirement; vandalism leaving lady owner scared; poor management, and insufficient local support. Someone is trying to open a shop in Lockton, and is receiving advice from Graham.

Social/Community

The shop also offers fax, photocopying, a chimney sweep (he trained himself when the local chimney sweep stopped – now he hires someone as well), free notice board, transport information, prescription fetching, free delivery and milk round 3 days/week, and receive parcels for people if they're out! The Slaters have even considered a travelling cobbler, but "everything's a balance". They get a lot of trade from local pubs/restaurants. The shop provides locally sourced employment for 2 full-time owner/managers, 1 part-time family member, and 1 year round employee part-timer. Flexible hours are offered. They do their own accounts but use local contractors, where available, for other service contracts. The shop responds to the needs of the community – Graham says "I don't think there is anything I haven't been able to do that I've been asked." When they first opened they just had books, sweets and milk, but through chatting to local people they established what customers wanted. New people to the area are invited to request items they would like that aren't currently stocked. They also support the community by raising money for local charities.

Environmental

All of the employees live within 50-100 yards of the shop and are able to walk to work. The delivery service uses a transit Vauxhall Midi van, distinctive by its blackboard painted exterior containing chalked promotions. The landscape is changing, as the small rented farms that cannot make a living are gradually replaced by larger ones. Where just a few years ago there were 6 working farms in the village there are now only 4. The farms are predominantly organic vegetable and dairy, arable and intensive turkey rearing, and mixed. Wastage in the shop is minimal – concentrated effort keeps it to £10 a week. With a high percentage of local products the packaging is also reduced as these products tend to be packaged in simple recyclable materials. The organic produce has to be packaged, but the vegetables come in nets, and the potatoes in large sacks. The meat is vac-packed at the butchers.

The Future

The business is currently sustainable and growing – sufficient to support a family. Future plans include an investment in video hire, and refitting to create a nice old-fashioned shop.

Comments, advice and conclusion

Access: "Brought new products to the attention of a lot of the locals, like organic & fair trade."

Social: "Now everyone knows each other. There is somewhere to chat. I have a bench outside, tables & chairs. I give tea & coffee to locals (free) – charge the tourists! The shop has improved the cohesiveness of the community. Some people didn't know each other before – half work outside, half are true locals. I know it has added something to the village – because folk say so".

"Ferndale is typical, split in half. Farmers (great community spirit, support each other, go to local school) & half in rented property (referred to by locals as hippies, go to different school). They didn't know each

other. I know them all. It's been nice to get some of them together". Children are also getting more involved with each other.

"Farming community just wants to grow & sell ...hopeless at marketing. New organic egg enterprise – I've found him so many outlets; he says I'm his best marketer!"

The Gillamoor village shop is a fantastic example of a shop that is committed to the local community and is providing a multitude of essential and desirable services. In addition, the Slater's desire to promote local produce is sustaining a wider community of suppliers. It is a very customer driven business – as Graham Slater says, "We run the shop for the convenience of customers, not ourselves. That includes getting and doing what the customer wants – supporting the local community." This is borne out by customer comments on their website, including:

"What a lovely shop. It's full of.....everything!"

"This shop is the best thing to happen around here for years!"

Contact Details

Organisation Name	Gillamoor Shop
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Contact Name	Josephine & Graham Slater

Case Study: Chadlington Quality Foods, Oxfordshire



Summary

Chadlington Quality Foods is a village owned general store, in the Cotswolds, Oxfordshire. In addition to a full range of standard grocery items and wines/spirits, they specialise in home-baked pies, quiches, cakes etc. made on the premises in a revamped kitchen at the back of the shop. They also offer continental cheeses and a range of home-baked bread (organic, French sticks etc), as well as local jersey cream and butter and smoked fish products. The fruit and vegetables are local in season. Their customer base includes both local villagers and shoppers from neighbouring villages (up to a radius of 10 miles). Regenerating interest within the village has been a priority.

History

The shop in its current guise was established in June 2001, after the villagers got together to put money in to keep it open; prior to that it had first been run successfully for many years, before changes in management and subsequent threat of closure. Approximately 50-60 villagers put in various amounts, in return for shares but no financial reward. Beyond that their participation is negligible – a committee of 3 meet regularly to oversee things, but the shop is self-managing with a team of experienced staff. The product range has changed in the nearly two years it has been open – an increase in the fresh produce (local where possible), and fish, following repeated orders.

Impact on rural community

Economic

With advice from ViRSA the shop received a start-up Community Services grant from the Countryside Agency's Vital Villages programme towards the cost of refrigeration. They have subsequently received a grant towards refurbishing the kitchen, also through the Vital Villages programme. . In the first year of trading, Chadlington Quality Foods turned over £196,571; in the second year of trading, the turnover was £209,811 – an increase of 6.7% on the first year. Having successfully applied for West Oxfordshire Council's 100% rural business rate relief scheme they will now save £1200/yr. Although it is difficult to make it work, the shop is profitable. Unfortunately, when they opened they received little support from local shoppers who had established shopping patterns elsewhere, and they are in the process of trying to entice them back. However, for many villagers from neighbouring areas it is a prime source of shopping and many spend £50-£100 a time. Many others spend £30-£40. They also have 60 accounts. Saturdays are particularly busy, but on average approximately 400 customers pass through the doors a week. They use most of the same suppliers as the shop previously did, of whom nearly 20% are local. The logistics of quantity and collection of sourcing locally is the biggest barrier, as well as the difficulties in

finding suppliers. They use a high-street bank in Chipping Norton, but are currently researching alternatives as they believe lower charges are available.

No similar shops have closed in recent years; another general store has opened 5 miles away but this doesn't impact on their trade because the home-bake aspect of Chadlington Quality Foods is what attracts their customers. The village of Shipton is also planning to open a community owned shop.

Social/Community

The shop also offers a free notice board, transport information and timetables and a free delivery service. They do their own cleaning but use local contractors where possible for all other services related to the shop. The shop provides locally sourced employment and flexible hours for 1 full-time employee, 4 year round part-time employees and 1 casual Saturday worker. Members of the voluntary committee cash up three times a week and help with banking, paperwork, maintenance, and window displays as required. The shop responds to the needs of the community by taking ad-hoc orders which they endeavour to supply. They recently provided the food for an Italian evening at the village hall to raise money for a local home-nursing team that supports terminally ill patients. This was a big success, raising more than £600 and increasing awareness of the ranges available at the shop.

Environmental

All but one of the employees live in the village and could walk to work. The manager lives 4 miles away. The delivery service is carried out using the manager's small van. Supplies are received in 2 or 3 big and some medium-sized lorries, so environmental impact is less than for supermarkets. There is almost zero product wastage – as the manager says, "that's just good shopkeeping". With a kitchen on the premises they are able to turn almost anything into something saleable, and anything else is reduced for clearance. The fresh produce is sold loose, so packaging is minimised, and the home-baked goods are sold in recyclable containers.



“The fresh produce is sold loose, so packaging is minimised”

The Future

The manager of Chadlington Quality Foods, Nick Burgess, believes that the business is sustainable. He feels that the essential ingredients are staff with experience, and the right attitude. However, he feels that the barriers to success are the high operating costs that come out of a community owned project – everything and everyone has to be paid for, where in a family owned enterprise more would be done at home. They need to attract more local customers into the shop, and plan to do this by advertising, putting

a special offers list in the local school, and an insert in a local magazine in Chipping Norton. Of the original supporters of the project, less than 10% come into the shop – this is typical of the difficulties in sustaining interest in and commitment to such a project (as Nick Burgess says of the local people’s support of the committee, “it goes off with a bang in the beginning, then dwindles” once they believe the work is done).

Conclusion

The support shown by the villagers when they looked likely to lose their local shop shows that it is perceived as vital community service, in particular the free delivery to the elderly and those without cars. In order to succeed as a business however the shop needs to offer something different, and Chadlington Quality Foods is showing the way with the majority of customers being attracted by the home-baked products. In a relatively affluent area, such as this part of Oxfordshire, rich with celebrities and aristocracy the quality and reputation of local products attracts customers from further afield. The final word for other villages looking to save their local shop comes from manager Nick Burgess, “It’s a good idea, with the right staff and right attitude, but it won’t be easy.”



The majority of customers are attracted by the home-baked products

Contact Details

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Case Study: The Little Green Wholefood Shop, Suffolk



Summary

The Little Green Wholefood Shop is a general store, selling health foods and environmentally friendly products, in the small market town of Bungay, Suffolk. It sells:

Pulses, nuts and fruits

Breads, cakes, pastries, grains and cereals

A large selection of fresh organic vegetables – sourced and provided locally by Organics East

Fresh and frozen meats from local Norfolk organic farms

Herbs, spices and herbal teas

Organic beers and wines

Non dairy foods for vegans or allergy sufferers

Currently approximately 25% of turnover is generated by local products, in particular meat, fruit and vegetables, dairy, crisps and chocolate. The customer base is predominantly local regulars. There is a greengrocer in Bungay, as well as a Londis, but according to the proprietor of the Little Green Wholefood Shop, Simon Thompson, there is no doubt that his shop is contributing to the sustaining of local shopping. It has gained in popularity, and recently was awarded a runner up mention in the national best health food shop category by a health magazine.

History

The Little Green Wholefood Shop was established by Simon Thompson in May 2002, in reaction to the quantity of hormones, steroids, pesticides and fertilisers found in our food. It is the fulfilment of a dream of his, to provide the first proper wholefood shop in Bungay, and he has designed it to be light, airy and contemporary to show off the products in an attractive light.

Impact on rural community

Economic

The Little Green Wholefood Shop did not receive any grants or start-up loans. It has not yet produced first year accounts, but it is just coming to the end of its first year with a turnover of approximately £115,000 with an estimated 30% profit margin. It is sited in a small market town with an approximate population of 6000. Although it does use large wholesalers for some products, it also has about 50 local suppliers (out of a total of 100 suppliers) of goods ranging from the expected fruit and vegetables, meat and dairy to the more unexpected – Kettle crisps and Booja-Booja chocolate (made in Norwich). Banking is done with Lloyds TSB, who have a local branch, but start-up advice was provided by the business centre in Lowestoft, where the manager has been very helpful. Simon Thompson recommends Lloyds TSB for business start-ups due to the provision of a business route map – a programme designed to establish the customer's aims and ambitions, together with the threats and inhibitions which could confound them.

Social/Community

The Little Green Wholefood Shop also offers a message board, an Internet connection and a toy basket to keep children entertained while their parents shop (this has proved very popular). It is also an informal information service, and is certainly the hub of the 'alternative' sector of Bungay. No delivery service is provided at the moment, but it is being considered. It provides locally sourced employment for 1 full-time owner/manager, 2 year round part-timers and 3 young casual workers. It also uses local tradespeople, organisations and individuals for all other services – i.e. building and maintenance, cleaning, accounts, legal and insurance. The shop responds to the needs of the community – there is a special orders book, and Simon attempts to meet all requests. If certain items come up repeatedly he adds them to his stock range. He is always interested in sourcing locally where possible, and his customers are too – the local dairy supplier was chosen following customer requests, after tastings at farmers' markets and positive coverage in the press. Unfortunately the plain packaging and unfamiliar name did not prove sufficiently popular with customers who had not tasted the products and the line has now been replaced with Rachel's organic dairy products.



“The shop responds to the needs of the community...”

Environmental

The time taken for employees to get to work ranges from 2 minutes by foot to 5 minutes by car. Deliveries from warehouses, which make up 60% of the total stock, are made in large trucks, but the remaining 40% are made in vans, which reduces the impact on the environment compared to the articulated lorries used by supermarkets. Fruit and vegetable wastage in terms of saleable stock is fairly high, mainly due to the fickle nature of the consumer, but most of it is given away to customers or family, or composted. All the fruit and vegetables, supplied by Organics East, are sold as loose produce, so packaging is minimal. However, the remaining stock is standard packed. No link is made between the local landscape and products sold, either by customers or the shopkeeper, but in the opinion of owner Simon Thompson this is mainly because “although customers want to buy local, nothing remains for them to have an affinity with in terms of landscape. East Anglia has been exploited, leaving very few small farms left, and the majority of land in the hands of companies. There is no particular heritage left to

promote.” However, the fruit and vegetables supplied by Organics East are, where available, sourced from the 4 counties comprising East Anglia – Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridge and Lincolnshire. In the English season this amounts to 80% of all vegetables supplied by Organics East. Only seasonal fruit and vegetables not available at the time in England, and produce that is not suitable for growing in England, is sourced from co-operatives in Italy and elsewhere in Europe.

The Future

The owner of the Little Green Wholefood Shop, Simon Thompson, has no doubt that the business is sustainable. He needs to grow his business by doing more local marketing, and is planning a leaflet drop. He would like to increase the percentage of products he sources locally, but the main barrier is the difficulty in finding suppliers, and the time and effort involved in doing so. He is more passionate about food being healthy and organic, but if these factors could be combined with sustaining local communities then all the better. Another barrier to local sourcing is that the quantity required by the shop sometimes cannot be met by a small supplier – this is where co-operatives of local suppliers could help.

Conclusion

The Little Green Wholefood Shop has about 50 local suppliers, offers flexible, local work to 6 people, and acts as an information hub to a community of people supporting alternative food and health. The market town of Bungay is not affluent – in fact it is still a town dominated by one employer, Clays printing factory. To attract the less well-off residents the shop has special offers, and sells homeopathic medicines not available elsewhere. The shop therefore also acts as a source of inspiration and change to attitudes about food and health. And in owner Simon Thompson’s opinion people’s attitudes are changing:



“Government needs to wake up to the fact that people want to know that their food is safe and local.”

Contact Details

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Contact Name	Simon Thompson

Case Study: High Street Organics, Somerset



Summary

High Street Organics is a food retailer that has been in existence for a total of three years, located in Bruton, Somerset. The shop was re-established as a community co-operative with the support of Somerset Food Links in 2002 and has a strong policy of sourcing local and organic produce. Customers are drawn from the local residents and the shop has established a loyal customer base. There are four other small shops in the town – two franchise convenience stores, a delicatessen and a butcher shop. The shop specialises in organic produce, including wholefoods, vegetables, fruit, dairy and baked goods as well as locally made soaps. Frozen organic ready meals are also sold. A wide range of local organic produce is stocked, especially vegetables and dairy products. Some non-organic products make up the range, especially where they are locally produced, and several smallholders now supply the shop regularly with fruit, eggs and vegetables.

History

The business was set up by a sole trader in winter 1999, with the intention of becoming a base for a home delivery service for the isolated villages and hamlets in East Somerset. The shop was empty and was offered at a low rent by the owner.

The shop proved to be too much for the founder proprietor to continue, but support from local people, including parents from a local school, generated interest in setting up a community enterprise to take over the running of the shop. This was set up in 2002 and has been running for over nine months under co-operative management.

The Co-op has 6 Directors from the community, including several of the volunteers who work in the shop, and the shop manager. The shop is registered as an Industrial and Provident Society. Somerset Food Links provided essential advice and support in the early stages, and helped with registration and local sourcing.

Impact on rural community

Economic

The turnover is small but gradually increasing – it started at £800/ week and is now averaging £1,200 per week. This equates to an annual turnover of £62,400. Local people provided investment of £1,000 which helped with buying stock. The premises and equipment are rented from the previous owner.

Local supplies of vegetables are provided by Somerset Organic Link, a growers' co-operative based 15 miles away in South Somerset. There is also a local grower who has gone back to local production

because of the shop and has begun to supply salads and herbs. Other local products supplied include honey, duck eggs and bread.

The shop uses the post office for banking and holds a separate savings account.

Social/Community

The shop acts as an important source of organic food for local people as well as providing an addition to the four other shops in the town. Some locally made crafts and art works are also on sale and displayed in the shop and a notice board advertises local therapists and events.

Much of the support work, such as collecting supplies and accountancy, is undertaken by volunteers. Assisting in the shop is also acting as a pathway to employment for many members of the community enterprise. All the people who work in the shop are resident within the town. There is now one part-time job as shop manageress supported by volunteers. As the shop has increased its turnover paid employment is about to commence.

The shop has reversed the trend in this small town of a gradual decline of small shops.

Every month the shop is used for a healthy cookery talk, and story telling for children is run occasionally by the local agent for Barefoot Books. An interest in food is a focus for like-minded people to work together to enhance the community.

A regular event in one of the pubs in the town is organised together with a cook who supplies bread to the shop. The first event was a Tapas evening with music, and food from the shop created an introduction to the good quality organic food available.

The shop is introducing new foods to its customers; for example a local gardener brought in some medlars to the shop and they were quickly sold to customers, in spite of being a very unusual fruit.



Environmental

Food miles are reduced – by providing a specialist range for customers the shop lessens the need to travel. The alternative is for people to travel 15 miles to the nearest large town with a wholefood shop.

Because the shop's focus is organic foods, sourced where available and often from elsewhere, the local sourcing policy could be given higher priority and have a greater impact. Much local garden surplus of vegetables and fruit sold in the year was supplied by only four or five local people, and this number could be increased.

Packaging waste is minimised, by choosing suppliers which offer returnable packaging, and paper and cardboard collected for recycling. Refillable cartons of household cleaners are offered and any waste vegetables and fruit are collected for composting or to feed to geese.

The Future

The shop is a classic micro-enterprise having low turnover but lots of community support. The plan is to increasingly use the shop as a meeting place with a room for alternative therapies and possibly move to premises where an organic café can be started.

Conclusion

As with other village shops, High Street Organics is providing an essential community service in terms of social contact, community promotion through themed evenings and in-store events and the provision of essential items. In addition its USP – the organic focus – is raising awareness of health and food safety, as well providing a local shopping alternative to those already committed to these principles.

Contact Details

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Contact Name	Camilla Robbins (Manageress)

Case Study: Maiden Bradley Village Shop, Wilts



Summary

Maiden Bradley Village Shop, in West Wiltshire is a general store that has been operating as a community enterprise for 18 months. The community took on the running of the shop when the previous proprietor wanted to retire. It is the only shop in a village of 300 people and is an important facility and meeting place for the community. The community received a grant from the Countryside Agency Vital Villages programme towards setting up the shop. Customers are a mix of local residents and tourists who visit popular National Trust and Historic houses in West Wiltshire. The shop is a typical small convenience store, stocking a full range of foods and drink as well as newspapers, cards and stationery. Several local producers now supply the shop regularly with meat, cheese, dairy products, jams and cider forming approximately 15% of food products in the store. In 2001 the shop was winner of the Salisbury Business Award for community initiatives.

History

The community association was formed in 2001 with the support of the Parish Council and many people in the village. Local interest was driven by concern about loss of the only shop in an isolated small village. Previously the shop had been run by a local family and trade had gradually declined. There had been a shop of various kinds on the site for many decades including a bakehouse and slaughterhouse.

The shop also contains a sub-post office which is an essential amenity especially for the retired residents. The only other local amenity in the village is the local pub.

The shop manageress and the shop management committee have been keen to stock a good range of local products. This complements the standard brands bought from the cash and carry and ensures a range in terms of products and price.

The setting up of the community association was undertaken with support and advice from a local advisor from ViRSA who helped the community establish an Industrial and Provident Society for community benefit. They also helped with a three-year business plan which helped access the Countryside Agency grant.

Since the shop has been up and running the initial projections have proved to be more optimistic than the reality.

Impact on rural community

Economic

The shop has been trading for 18 months and had a turnover of £120,000 in the first year. Set up costs were high including refurbishment costs, shop equipment and cost of stock. Almost £5,000 was raised

from shares and bonds invested by local residents, and this was matched by £21,000 of Countryside Agency grant.

There are many regular customers from the village, with probably at least half the community using the shop regularly. A few customers do their regular weekly shopping in the shop. The sub-post office is an important factor in ensuring local spending in the shop as well as providing access to the GiroBank.

Local products were sourced with relative ease via local directories and local contacts. Organic dairy products are supplied by Yeo Valley who promote direct supplies in the local area, Cheese and butter are delivered by a producer ten miles away and meat and poultry from a local wholesaler who sources within the neighbouring county. Jams and pickles are also supplied by an on farm processor twenty miles away and bottled waters sourced from within five miles.

The shop runs regular promotions of local products to entice people into the store; at Easter a chocolate giant Easter chicken produced by a local specialist chocolate maker was the prize in a raffle to raise money for a local club. Every season there is a local product promotion and at Christmas bronze turkeys are ordered and delivered to local customers.

Local produce is an important part of the shop's marketing strategy: "We tempt them in with local products; they sell well and make good treats".

The village has a steady stream of tourists in the summer, ramblers and cyclists stop for tea and coffee, a gazebo and garden seats are set up outside in the summer, also many people stop on their way to Longleat House asking for directions.

Social/Community

"The shop is the heart of the community it is a meeting place for people in the village"

Dry cleaning, home delivery, post office, bottle gas, garden compost, a notice board advertising things for sale are all additional services available at the shop. There are also lots of opportunities for people to help out with running the shop; eight volunteers help out during the week and at weekends.

The shop has a full-time manageress and a full-time assistant who work flexible hours. Everyone who works in the shop lives within walking distance.

The shop runs a local lottery for local clubs and societies. Customers select a number at random for a pound and every four weeks, if the number is selected as the bonus ball in the national lottery the winner gets half the takings and the other half goes to local clubs and charities such as the gardening club, OAP club or church repair fund.

Environmental

Most of the cardboard is collected for recycling and waste is kept to a minimum. Many of the local suppliers deliver on a weekly basis and the local residents are able to walk to the shop. Elderly residents without a car have their groceries delivered to them from the shop.

The Future

The shop will need to sustain the support and enthusiasm of local residents and it is always a struggle to get enough volunteers to help and remind them that the shop is as much a community service as a business. The tight margins on many of the household goods give the shops little margin for error and no funds to cover major repairs.

Ideas to develop the business include offering ice cream as another thing to entice local customers and passing trade into the shop.

The management committee for the shop meets regularly and is trying to reduce the length of time spent discussing issues in the monthly evening meetings.

Conclusion

The shop succeeds because of the strong local support, and the grant and local investment which enabled it to be set up with equipment, stock and new fittings. The shop is very much a community enterprise, with any profits going back into the community through local clubs and societies. Local products are an important part of the marketing and promotional strategy:

“Come on and buy, give local a try” is the slogan on the promotion of local jams, pickles, chocolates and mineral waters.



“Local interest was driven by concern about loss of the only shop in an isolated small village”

Contact Details

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Case Study: Harbertonford Post Office and Stores, Devon



Summary

Harbertonford Post Office and Stores is a post office and general village store, serving the village of Harbertonford near Totnes, Devon. Of the wide variety of produce on offer the following are locally sourced where possible: fresh apple juice and other juices, organic Riverford milk, organic yoghurts, cakes, honey, fruit and vegetables, fish, eggs, preserves, and bacon. Currently approximately 10-15% of stock is local.

History

The shop was established in September 1994, and is family owned and run. The range of products stocked has changed in response to customer demand, and they try to support local suppliers where they can. They have had to promote themselves outside the village, as the local customer base would be insufficient for survival.

Impact on rural community

Economic

The shop did not receive any start-up grant or loan, and has now been in business for nine years. The mark-up on stock varies, but averages 18%. Although it does use 2 large wholesalers who are regional and national distributors (Bookers and Palmer & Harvey), it has 40 suppliers in total, of whom many are local – e.g. the butcher, producers, Hawkridge farm for cheese. Although they sell Riverford milk and some cream, they also stock dairy products from a more local supplier, and they find that their customers prefer it to be local than well known. Although Riverford Farm produces good quality meat they buy meat from a farmer who lives up the road, has his meat slaughtered in Ashburton on Monday and delivers the sausages and other cuts to them on Wednesday. When they first started they didn't find local producers coming forward to promote themselves and they didn't particularly go looking for them, but this is now changing as the concept of local food takes off, so they don't find local sourcing particularly difficult. Because they are very keen to promote local food they are always prepared to try new local products out in the shop, provided they meet a high standard. They have a wide network of farms around them and if the quality on offer is good they will use them in preference to any producers from further afield. They feel it is important for their bank to offer good value for cheque deposits, and there is a cash machine in the shop.

No other shops have opened or closed in recent years, but the village only has them, a garage, a curtain shop and a pub – it is truly a working village. The owner doesn't believe that the opening of nearby supermarkets is an acceptable reason for a village store to close. In his opinion the problem is that the shopkeepers get negative and do not attempt to compete. He believes that his ability to buy in small units

from local suppliers means he is able to stock more variety, and sell products that are not available in supermarkets, such as lemon and blackberry jam, and tangerine marmalade. He also finds that tourists are looking for something different when they are on holiday and therefore will not be attracted by the supermarket unless they fail to find anything of interest in the village store. As always a unique selling point helps – recently a friend of his did a painting of the front of the shop while on a painting holiday, and they now have this picture printed on labels for biscuits, jams and many other products sourced locally, which increases their appeal to tourists.

Social/Community

As well as being a post office and stores, the shop offers dry-cleaning, photocopying, the cash machine, a notice board (advertises cost 50p/month to a charity box), bus timetables, a local news-sheet and free delivery twice a week. It provides locally sourced employment with flexible hours for 2 full-time family owners, 1 full-time employee and 9 year round part-time employees. Apart from accounting services from a firm in Tunbridge Wells and insurance from Exeter they use local tradespeople for building and maintenance contracts. They provide produce at cost price for community events. The shop responds to the needs of the community, as they try to meet individual requests and they are always happy to donate prizes for raffles, whether it be for church, school or any other purpose – the owner believes “you have to support the community; that’s what it’s all about.” The community spirit in Harbertonford is very much alive – the church ladies are well established; there is an artists’ open day and many other lively events, despite the small size of the village. This spirit lends itself to local support for a village shop, and is probably essential if such a venture is to succeed.

Environmental

The owners and six of the employees live within the village, while the remaining 4 live within 3.5 miles. They use two cars for deliveries. The rural landscape is made up of mixed farms, and many of the local farmers are gradually developing new lines which the shop is happy to trial (e.g. one of their regular suppliers has recently started supplying duck eggs and these have been successful, mainly due to the fact that the customers know the lady producing them and were therefore keen to try them). There are also some new organic farmers in the area, some of whom have come in from outside Devon (e.g. from London) and do not have a strong agricultural background. Some of the products these farmers bring to offer the shop are not acceptable for various legislative reasons to do with labelling, etc., and in these cases the owners offer advice and point them in the direction of Local Government offices to receive support and guidance. Where they do take on local products they discuss the source with their customers and find them, in particular the older customers, reassured that the supplier is someone they know. Wastage is mainly fruit and vegetables, which goes to a local person with animals. A commercial wheelie bin is collected twice a week. Packaging is reduced as they sell mainly loose products, but some is by necessity prepacked. They are now finding that as their customers become more aware of environmental issues, and know that the eggs etc. have only come from up the road, they are happy to bring their own boxes to put them in, to save the shop or the producer having to package them.

The Future

Nine years trading is testament to the business being sustainable, and this is confirmed by the owners, Mike and Carol Evans. A key to their success is always to be looking to the future, and this will continue. They have just introduced fresh fishcakes, and will always consider new lines and local produce if presented to them. Mike Evans believes that “supermarkets have had their way for too long and the time has come to fight fire with fire”. His advice to would be village shopkeepers is to “give it a whirl!” He also believes that people do not want to eat chemicals and those farmers who do not want to move with the times and make changes may fail, but local farmers, however small, do not have to fail if they work hard, take care of their farms and equipment and constantly look forward.

Conclusion

In a village with a population of approximately 1000, and only 1 pub, a garage and a curtain shop, it is clear that Harbertonford Post Office and Stores is providing an essential service. Not only is it a lifeline to the elderly, housebound and those without cars with free local delivery, but with all the additional services it is the hub of the village. Without it the sense of community in a working village would be completely lost. As a long-standing, sustainable business it has lessons to offer anyone considering a similar venture. It also shows the benefit of useful advice – in this part of Devon the local farmers all communicate with each other, and are happy to take advice from South Hams District Council. This had led to them successfully and proactively promoting their products to suitable outlets, including their local village shop, and this success is replicated elsewhere in Devon where the local food sector is thriving.

Contact Details

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Address	Harbertonford, Nr Totnes, Devon
Tel No	01803 732220
Contact Name	Mike and Carol Evans

Case Study: Winchelsea Little Shop, East Sussex



Summary

Winchelsea Little Shop Ltd is a newsagent and general store, which has recently been established as a co-operative, serving the village of Winchelsea, East Sussex. It sells newspapers & magazines, ices, minerals, frozen food, groceries, fresh dairy cream, fresh fruit and vegetables, locally grown plants & flowers and cards. Currently 25% of turnover is generated by local products, and it is hoped to increase this to 50% or higher in the next few years. The customer base is predominantly local regulars, using it as their main source of groceries rather than as a convenience store. An informal delivery service caters for the infirm and housebound, and it is hoped to set up a pre-order facility via fax or email aimed at the second home weekenders.

History

The Little Shop was established in February 2002, eighteen months after a fire destroyed the previous village shop. It is community owned as an Industrial and Provident Society, and has 320 members. Since it started it has increased the quantity of products stocked, in particular local products, and has broadened the range to include local ice-cream, honey, bread, smoked meat and fish, jam, marmalade and an increased range of fruit and vegetables.

Impact on rural community

Economic

The Little Shop received a start-up grant of £18,500 from the Countryside Agency's Vital Villages programme, £3,000 from the Rye partnership and £15,000 from the shareholder members. Its first year turnover was £190,000 with a 22% profit margin. Of this turnover £50,000 was derived from local products. It is sited in a village with an approximate population of 600, of whom an estimated 500 use it for some purchases, and the majority for a basket of goods costing £20-60 a time. Roughly 250-300 customers pass through the doors each day. It has added value of £20-40 a week through the collection and bagging up of salads from a local grower. Although it does use 2 large wholesalers who are regional and national distributors, it also has nearly 3 dozen local suppliers of goods ranging from the expected fruit and vegetables, eggs, lamb, honey etc. to the more unusual – salad dressing, postcards and muesli. They use a high-street bank in neighbouring Rye, and the branch manager was extremely helpful on start-up, even joining the committee.

Winchelsea lost its post office in 2000 and neighbouring Icklesham (which is about 3-4 times the size) is about to lose its last shop. The decline of the villages was very obvious, but the reopening of the Little Shop after a keenly felt absence of 18 months has made a tremendous difference. In nearby Rye Harbour the local store has reopened with assistance.

Social/Community

The Little Shop also offers fax/photocopying facilities, a free notice board and a free informal delivery service. It would offer more, but at only 200 sq ft space is a constraint. However a grant application has been made to the Countryside Agency to convert the building next door into a community computer centre and it is hoped that this would provide other services such as a post office. What the Little Shop does provide that is immeasurable in terms of value is a meeting place for the community, in particular the older population who have little or no other human contact. It is also an information point, and the first port of call for emergency reports of, for example, crime or illness. It provides locally sourced employment for 1 full-time manageress, 2 year round part-timers and 4 young weekend workers, plus a cleaner. Apart from specialist insurance from a firm in Sussex it also uses local tradespeople for building and maintenance contracts, and a local resident (also on the committee) for the accounts. A team of 30 volunteers drawn from the shareholders helps with filling shelves etc. This has no economic benefit to the village, but definitely a social one, as again it provides an opportunity to meet and cement the sense of community that led to the set-up of the shop. The shop responds to the needs of the community – last year it sent out a questionnaire asking for opinion on a wide range of issues, including product range and shop appearance, and as a result of feedback changed their product mix. In response to a request for English rather than Danish bacon they went one better and started stocking locally produced bacon. There was a clear demand for more local produce, in particular apples.

Environmental

All but one of the employees live within a quarter of a mile of the shop and are able to walk to work. The informal delivery service is predominantly on foot, with the occasional need for a wheelbarrow. The local suppliers use small delivery vans, and only the 2 national distributors use lorries, but not the extra large articulated ones as used by supermarkets. While the shop was closed the locals had to drive for several miles to do their shopping, and made the journeys more than once a week. With the majority doing the bulk of their shopping now at the Little Shop car journeys outside the village have been reduced by an estimated 42%. With many of the local suppliers able to make a living by selling to several small shops in neighbouring villages the rural landscape has been left diverse, and the valley to one side of Winchelsea is made up of many small farms. As quality and freshness of produce is of prime concern, and the suppliers are free from the strict aesthetic criteria of the supermarket buyers, wastage is minimal – currently it is 2% or less for fruit and vegetables, with a target of 1-1.5%, and very low on other products. The main cause of wastage so far has been seasonal fluctuations of tourists leading to difficulties in assessing stock requirements, and heat. With a high percentage of local products the packaging is also reduced as these products tend to be packaged in simple recyclable materials. The large wholesaler does not recycle the delivery containers; however the local suppliers deliver the fresh produce loose in reusable containers, which they recycle.

...the rural landscape has been left diverse...



The Future

The chairman of the Little Shop committee, Richard Comotto, has no doubt that the business is sustainable. He feels that given the right staff, commitment and a positive attitude (and some financial help at start-up) others could be undertaking similar ventures successfully. He is also committed to giving the customers more local produce as requested, and is working with Common Cause (a co-operative promoting environmentally sustainable development and supporting the local economy by offering training, advice and networking for producers, running a Farmers' Market and supporting local food links) on the possibility of setting up a local distribution network. This would be a major project, but the search costs involved in sourcing local suppliers are high and this is a barrier to increasing the local element of their product range. They have also experienced some problems sourcing locally – for example, despite being in a prime apple growing area they are unable to stock local apples straight from the source. Due to the large scale production and packing of apples into gas chilled containers it is not viable for the suppliers to sell to them in small quantities, and so the local apples have to travel to London before making the journey back.

Conclusion

The Winchelsea Little Shop spends £50,000 with local suppliers, pays out £28,000 in local wages, with an estimated local multiplier effect of 2, and provides an essential service to a village where more than 50% of the population is retired. Moreover to a dozen or so elderly people, unable to leave their homes, it provides a critical service. Also, being in a relatively affluent area it is able to sell things that some other village shops can't, including specialist local products. Its presence keeps local shopping alive, which, in turn, helps the local butcher to remain open. There is no doubt that it has a big local impact; just one example is the bread order with the local baker which is 10 times the size of the previous shop's order, and makes up a significant part of the baker's livelihood. As chairman Richard Comotto says, in response to a query to about the sustainability of Winchelsea Village in the absence of the Little Shop, "alternatives are not palatable, it would cease to be a community".



...which, in turn, helps the local butcher to remain open...

Contact Details

Organisation Name	Winchelsea Little Shop
Address	The High Street Winchelsea TN36 4EA
Tel No	01797 224 446
Email	comottor@aol.com
Contact Name	Richard Comotto

Section Three Summary of Activity around the Country

This section presents a brief summary of other activity in the country – offering up snapshots of enterprises that are exploring the potential of the local food sector in innovative ways

Moorsfresh, Pickering, North Yorkshire
Moorsfresh is a distribution service for local products supplying independent shops in Yorkshire. The company runs 5 temperature controlled vehicles and a 7,000 sq. ft. premise for collection and delivery of Yorkshire products to Yorkshire independent grocers. A small sales team collects orders from retailers and these are collated and placed with producers. The orders are then fulfilled within 48 hours, creating a responsive and high-quality service. The business was set up in late 2002, and in the early part of 2003 was adding 6 to 10 new retail customers per week. It has 11 employees and was set up by Nigel Brotherton, who has a long history of experience in logistics management for a national retailer.
Contact: info@moorsfresh.co.uk

19 Gales, Warwickshire	
Developed by: Nelson & Kaye Hollinshead	Products and customers: Meat & Fruit Pies
Size of business, turnover and capital	Quality schemes:
Legal Structure: Private business	Staff and operations:
Reasons for good practice: Good Product, no compromise on quality, strong commitment to Farmers' Market principles	Issues to enable and prevent copying:
<p>Details:</p> <p>Arable and vegetable farmers started selling at Farmers' Markets in Dec 2000. Farmer's mother started baking some pies which rapidly overtook vegetable sales. Has bought 3 lots of machinery, larger each time, to keep pace with demand and took over several farm buildings for bakery.</p> <p>Now employs dozens of people. Own wheat returned by millers and goes into bakery. Land growing barley last year now planted with orchards and soft fruit.</p> <p>Starting a joint venture with neighbouring dairy farmer to set up butter production for pastry. Looking to work with livestock farmers to graze stock on his land with guaranteed market for meat.</p>	
Additional material available:	<p>Contact details: name, address, tel no., e-mail and web</p> <p>www.19gales.co.uk</p> <p>info@19gales.co.uk</p>

Name: Manor Farm Shop, Long Whatton, Leics.	
Developed by: Graeme & Vivienne Matravers	Products and customers: Large range of organic food Local and from wider area
Size of business, turnover and capital	Quality schemes: Soil Association Licensees
Legal Structure: Private business	Staff and operations: Family + Part time help in shop & Part time butcher
Reasons for good practice: Attractive premises, Attentive service, Good range of products for sale	Issues to enable and prevent copying: Sympathetic and supportive landlord, good location, good network of local producers and suppliers
<p>Details:</p> <p>The Paget Estate has made a policy of letting vacant tenancies to farmers willing to convert to organic production. Graeme and Vivienne Matravers took on Manor Farm in 1994 and set about the conversion looking to direct local marketing as the main outlet for their produce. One of the farm buildings was converted to a shop with cold store and small meat cutting and packing room.</p> <p>The shop is open Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays and most of the beef, lamb and vegetables sold there are produced on the farm. Extra meat is sourced from neighbouring organic farms, bread, fruit and vegetables are supplied by a local organic baker and distributor and organic wholefoods come from the Leicester Wholefood Co-operative.</p> <p>The shop has developed a very loyal customer base and also offers open days on the farm and a farm trail. The Matravers also operate an organic vegetable box scheme and sell at two local Farmers' Markets. They have just started on an RES funded project to renovate redundant buildings around their yard to provide an on-farm bakery to supply the shop and some other business units.</p>	
Additional material available:	Contact details: name, address, tel no., e-mail and web Graeme & Vivienne Matravers, Manor Farm, 77 Main Street Long Whatton Loughborough LE12 5DF 01509 646413 shop@manororganicfarm.co.uk www.manororganicfarm.co.uk

Name: Organics East – Eostre Organics			
Developed by:	Graham Hughes (organic producer) & Clive Peckham (East Anglia Food Link).	Products and customers:	Organic vegetables for shops, food co-ops, caterers.
Legal Structure:	Secondary marketing co-operative.	Staff and operations:	Seven producer members plus associates and three staff,
Reasons for good practice:	Collaborative marketing and distribution. Direct link with Italian co-op to complement local supply.	Issues to enable and prevent copying:	East Anglia Food Link gave support and seed funding early on, farmer led development. Link with Italian co-op enabled by one person with strong links to Italy.
Details:			
<p>Eostre Organics is a co-operative that directly benefits small businesses and, as a consequence, the rural economy. They have secured a Rural Enterprise Scheme (RES) grant² which specifically supports projects which benefit rural businesses and communities. With the help of East Anglia Food Link a group of producers formed an enterprise to sell produce together to shops and customers in parts of East Anglia. They spent a year meeting, planning and researching their business and then made contact with DEFRA³ in the region who advised them to submit a RES bid. They prepared a business plan according to the format and after six months their plan was approved. They have a strong business plan, which will protect jobs and support rural development. The principles of the new co-op are set out in the Organics East Charter and the co-op will be officially launched in April 2003. Current supply is to box scheme operators in East Anglia and London, shops in Cambridge and Norwich and caterer for an environmental studies centre.</p>			
Additional material available:	Press Pack can be ordered from EAFL or downloaded from the website: www.eafl.org.uk	Contact details: name, address, tel no., e-mail and web	Clive Peckham or Tully Wakeman East Anglia Food Link 49a High Street Watton Norfolk IP25 6AB Tel: 01953 889200 E-mail eafl@gn.apc.org

² The Rural Enterprise Scheme is one of three grants which fund projects which support rural development and diversification, these are part of the English Rural Development Programme (ERDP).

³ Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

Name: Somerset Farmers Markets Direct			
Developed by:	Somerset Food Links and Somerset Farmers' Market Ltd	Products and customers:	Full range of vegetables, fruit, meat, baked goods and some dry goods. 100 plus customers per week. Households and local shops
Size of business, turnover and capital	Operating for 18 months Growing from £50,000/ year to £200,000/ year turnover	Quality schemes:	
Legal Structure:	A subsidiary of the Farmers' Market company which is a secondary marketing co-operative with over 100 members	Staff and operations:	Two full-time staff and three part time
Reasons for good practice:	Small distribution company owned by producers. Full range of products, creating an alternative to supermarket home delivery services	Issues to enable and prevent copying:	Farmers' Market group was the starting point for this new business. Manager is key to success, has the entrepreneurial flair and shares the values.
Details:			
<p>Somerset Farmers' Markets Direct – a subsidiary of SFM Ltd delivering to households and shops in the mid-Somerset area. Currently supplying 100 households per week, plan to grow to 300 customers per week in the future. Local is ensured by the FM rules developed by the producers and in line with NAFM standards. Focus is on door-to-door delivery for households in a 10-mile radius of Glastonbury. New customers found through existing customer recommendation, recruiting local agents, including shops, paid on incentive based sales. The delivery business takes 23% of the retail price, acts as agent and does not take ownership of local products.</p> <p>Customers order from a catalogue and phone or fax orders into depot (or agent) every Monday evening. Orders collated and sent to producers who deliver on Wed or Thursday. Deliveries on Thursday evening.</p>			
Additional material available:	Case study from Somerset Food Links	Contact details: name, address, tel no., e-mail and web	Roger White Unit 5 Thomas Way Glastonbury Somerset BA6 9LU farmersmarketsdirect@ukonline.co.uk

Somerset Rural Food Initiative	
Developed by: Somerset Food Links	Services Support for independent retailers to source local products by providing resources, publicity materials and help to organise 'meet the producer' events
Legal Structure: Project of Food Links	Staff and operations: One staff member part-time
Reasons for good practice: A simple but effective system for getting more local produce into independent shops (and village shops) in a rural area	Issues to enable or event replication <p>The existence of a distribution company is critical to success in cases where shops have become agents.</p> <p>Otherwise, producers with the wherewithal to deliver their own (and each other's) produce is necessary.</p> <p>Producers must also be willing to collaborate, particularly by being part of launch events.</p>
<p>Details:</p> <p>Somerset Food Links set up a pilot scheme in Mendip district, which has successfully enabled independent shops to stock a wider range of local products during 2002. In Mendip, 11 shops joined the Initiative.</p> <p>During 2003 the Initiative is being replicated in South Somerset district on an area by area basis. So far 16 shops have joined the Initiative in Area North, and promotional events publicising these shops are on-going. Shops are now being recruited in Areas West and South.</p> <p>Both shops and producers reporting increased turnover. One producer reports that one shopkeeper has tripled the size of his order as a result of the Initiative.</p> <p>Throughout the project, there have been different launch events in towns and villages for the various shops in the Initiative. The events, at which a selection of local producers offer their products for tasting, are critical to the success of the project, as they are the means to bring members of the community into the Initiative. Village events, in particular have been very successful.</p> <p>As well as dealing direct with local producers, some shops have opted to become agents for Somerset Local Food Direct.</p> <p>The Initiative has produced a handbook for retailers and is being expanded to cover other districts in the county.</p>	
Contact details: name, address, tel no., e-mail and web	<p>Christina Ballinger, Somerset Food Links, Old Town Hall Bow Street Langport Somerset TA10 9PR</p> <p>Tel : 01458 259485</p>

Name: Bridport Centre for Local Food			
Developed by:	West Dorset Food and Land Trust	Products and customers:	Business Support services, access to processing facilities, local food business start ups
Size of business, turnover and capital	Projected at 100,000 per year after initial capital investment	Quality schemes:	
Legal Structure:	Property Trust being established to own the lease	Staff and operations:	One centre manager
Reasons for good practice:	Local food business incubation. Voluntary sector led not public sector	Issues to enable and prevent copying:	Many good examples of business cluster and business incubation in urban areas. WDFLT has the ability to initiate and seek charitable and public sector funding.
Details:			
<p>The centre was set up in 2002 and offices set up for marketing and training. The building was refurbished and is not providing office services and IT training with the local college. Initially it was proposed to set up a meat cutting room for a 12 member organic producer co-operative, this is now on hold. A shared use kitchen has been installed for small processors for product development and market testing. The centre is also the distribution base for an organic vegetable box scheme.</p>			
Additional material available:	Brochure on the centre and how it contributes to the Local Food Economy is available	Contact details: name, address, tel no., e-mail and web	Tim Crabtree West Dorset Food and Land Trust Centre for Local Food Unit 17, St. Michael's Trading Estate Foundry Lane Bridport, Dorset, DT6 3RR (01308) 420269 tim.crabtree@foodandland.org

Appendix One **Contacts**

Common Cause Co-operative Ltd

A co-operative promoting environmentally sustainable development and supporting the local economy by offering training, advice and networking for producers, running a Farmers' Market and supporting local food links.

The Green Room
20 North Street
LEWES

East Sussex
BN7 2PE

Tel: 01273 470900 Email: comcause@commoncause.fsnet.co.uk

Eat the View

The Countryside Agency's Eat the View initiative aims to help people make the links between the products they buy and the countryside they cherish.

Countryside Agency
John Dower House
Crescent Place
CHELTENHAM
Gloucestershire
GL50 3RA

Tel: 01242 533393 Fax: 01242 584270 Email: peter.simpson@countryside.gov.uk
www.countryside.gov.uk/LivingLandscapes/eat_the_view/index.asp

Farm Business Advice Service

The Service comprises up to three days of an adviser's time for free, one-to-one, basic business advice resulting in the development of an Action Plan suggesting how to take the farm business forward. Clients will be directed to the services / funding streams required to implement their Action Plan. Any follow-up services will be charged at the normal rate.

To apply call the Small Business Service on **0845 600 9006** between 8:30am and 5:30pm Monday to Friday.

www.defra.gov.uk/farm/fbadvice/fbadvice.htm

Farm Retail Association

The Farm Retail Association exists to help farmers and producers sell their produce direct and encourages high standards of quality, food safety and presentation.

The Greenhouse
P O Box 575
Southampton,
Hampshire,
SO15 7BZ

Tel: 0845 230 2150 Email: FRA@farmshopping.com

www.farmshopping.com

Local Food Works

Local Food Works is a partnership project between the Soil Association and the Countryside Agency to foster sustainable local food economies. Its newly-launched website is a 'one-stop' information service which covers all aspects of the local food sector throughout England's regions. It offers information on news and events, case studies and briefing sheets as well as a comprehensive information library, all of which is regularly updated. The site is designed to act as a central resource with links to all networks and organisations involved in local food on a local, regional or national level.

www.localfoodworks.org

National Association of Farmers' Markets

South Vaults
Green Park Station
Green Park Road
BATH
BA1 1JB

Tel: 01225 787914 Fax: 01225 460840 Email: nafm@farmersmarkets.net

National Association of Village Shops Website

This is a website to proclaim the services of village shops and post offices throughout the country, aiming to shift the public's focus back on to local issues, local produce and local employment. They plan to offer all village shops and post offices a free place on the web.

Steamer Point
29 West Street
LEWES
East Sussex
BN7 2NZ

Tel: 01273 473 422 Fax: 01273 483 109 Email: alan.wyle@srcc.org.uk

www.villageshops.org.uk

Rural Shops Alliance

A national association for village shopkeepers, whose objective is to support, advise, encourage and lobby on behalf of rural retailers to become more proactive and professional.

The Little Keep
Bridport Road
DORCHESTER
Dorset
DT1 1SQ

Tel: 01305 259383 Fax: 01305 259384 Email: info@rural-shops-alliance.co.uk

www.rural-shops-alliance.co.uk

Village Retail Services Association (ViRSA)

Helping villages to keep their shop and post office.

Email: virsa@ruralnet.org.uk

Vital Villages

A Countryside Agency programme that puts community decision-making in the hands of the people who live there, and gives grants, quickly, in order to make things happen. The four grant schemes in the programme are: Parish Plan, Community Services, Parish Transport and Rural Transport Partnership.

Vital Villages National Team

5th Floor

1 Redcliff Street

BRISTOL

BS1 6NP

Tel: 0117 9102940

Fax: 0117 9102901

Email: info@countryside.gov.uk

www.countryside.gov.uk/vitalvillages