



Project 2.5.1

Eating green is not just for vegetarians - trends in food procurement in independent restaurants in Sheffield

The concept of food miles and how these impact on the environment in general and through carbon emissions in particular, has become a hot topic in the catering and restaurant trade.

This awareness has grown in the minds of consumers, who have an increasing appreciation of and demand for ethical, organically grown and fair-trade foods. But for local independent restaurants up and down the country, just how much is being done to address these issues?

A team of researchers from Sheffield Hallam University have taken the Sheffield restaurant scene as an example and looked at current practices of food procurement to examine if there is the potential to encourage a greater local buying regime to cut food miles.

The study has investigated the existing practices and operation of a selected sample of restaurants in Sheffield to see how they do and

plan in the future, to reflect these trends in the way that they operate. The study has looked at how the promotion of such activities can be used as an advertising/promotional aspect for participating restaurants.

A series of 18 face-to-face interviews were carried out with restaurant staff (mainly the owners) to review their current approach to food procurement. These interviews revealed that quality, price, delivery, meeting specification and reliability were the most important factors influencing the choice of supplier.

Customer priorities

Most restaurateurs felt that relatively few customers considered sustainable food as a major issue and most would not be willing to pay extra for these attributes in the food they purchased. For the customers, atmosphere and value for money were far more important considerations.



Above: Buying locally can cut food miles considerably.

Generally there was no specific policy about purchasing local food and indeed some confusion regarding local suppliers and local produce. Just over a quarter of the restaurants surveyed (about 27%) did have a commitment to using British and local foods. However the issue was clouded by those restaurants that specialised in authentic foreign cuisines and who



needed to obtain their ingredients from specific countries.

Whilst most restaurateurs understood the importance of traceability of food, this was often only as far as the local supplier and not right back through the food chain. Therefore, some restaurant owners thought they were buying local but were in fact only being supplied by a local trader.

When purchasing stock, most restaurants tended to operate alone and there were virtually no examples of collaborative purchasing of produce, even though this might have helped to secure better pricing. This first step research should be extended to look at the local food producers to see how they could better promote local usage and supply to the whole of the catering trade.

Key findings

The major outcomes of the study are:

- that there is scope for making local restaurant owners more aware of the current trends in consumer food purchasing - perhaps by a "meet the locals" evening
- that a means of bringing together suppliers of local produce and restaurateurs should be explored
- that such an approach could then be used to promote Sheffield restaurants not only for their food quality, but also for their "green" approach to food procurement. A similar study should be carried out across a wider area (perhaps North Yorkshire)
- to increase the range of local food producers and suppliers to ensure adequacy and variety of supply

There appear to be few studies similar to the above looking at procurement practices in relation to local foods. However it is likely that in the current increasingly concerned consumer environment, it is an aspect that will warrant further study and implementation.

The Food Innovation programme

This project is part of the University's £1.3m Food Innovation programme. Funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the food innovation programme is designed to help companies respond to the business growth opportunities created by the healthy eating agenda.

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