



# Developing Sustainable Food Chains

## Plymouth Food Procurement Project - Final Report August 2010 – March 2011

### Background

The aim of the **Plymouth Food Procurement Project (PFPP)**<sup>1</sup> was to strengthen the connection between the recently formed Plymouth Procurement Forum and the rich range of local food producers and processors, to enable more local and sustainable food to be supplied into Plymouth's public sector. With a longer term objective to build on this and other partnership work already being developed in Plymouth and with other stakeholders, to help create and build 'a truly sustainable food city'<sup>2</sup>.

### Aims

- Respond to regional, national and international issues of climate change, food security, health and sustainability
- Increase the commercial viability, sustainability and success of local and regional food businesses including producers and processors
- Build on city wide partnership work around local and sustainable food in Plymouth, already being developed by the Soil Association and the Barefoot Partnership
- Work with other existing and potential funding streams and stakeholders to help create and build a 'Sustainable Food City'.

### Approach taken

**Focus on the buyers** – The key to unlocking local supply into Plymouth, so it was vital to build relationships with them and help them develop a group ethos which would also increase the probability for the initiative to continue past this project.

**Make data collection a key component** - There was no data available on the size of the Plymouth public sector food and drink spend, nor on how much local food was currently supplied. Identifying the first would encourage suppliers to take the market seriously and the second would give buyers a baseline, benchmarks and local comparisons - all essential to motivating and empowering the buyers to use more local suppliers.

**Connect with different parts of the supply chain** – Build relationships with targeted producers and suppliers, in order to respond effectively to this new demand for local produce.

**Develop a city wide cross sector stakeholder group** – Established as part of the development of the

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<sup>1</sup> The Plymouth project was one of ten managed by SWFD and funded by South West Regional Development Agency. In total about 1,000 food and supply chain businesses are involved in this drive to increase the availability of local produce in the South West's seven counties; to the benefit of consumers, the local economy and the environment. Funding for all projects totals £695,000 and the SWFD estimate that the investment will generate £1.7 million extra funds.

<sup>2</sup> Plymouth Food Charter, February 2011 (Appendix V)

‘Sustainable Food City: Plymouth’ (SFCP) Big lottery funding bid led by the Soil Association. This group continued to meet as part of the PFFP and benefited from the project momentum and delivery. This group provides a structure to continue some of the aims of this work after this project end.

**A diverse and effective project team** - Formed a five-person team, all from different organizations and with diverse skills and experience, which produced several benefits:

- Good contacts eg. Roy Heath - local suppliers; Traci Lewis – south west organic food and farming; Peter Redstone – Plymouth, farming; Judith Ward – strategic procurement; Wendy Miller – academic and Plymouth local Food
- Wide experience in sector: Each member of the team had many years of experience in the food sector covering practice, policy and research. The team was able to draw on this throughout the project
- Ability to come up with creative responses to project problems and opportunities eg. reframing of 17<sup>th</sup> February ‘meet the buyer/supplier’ workshop
- Develop team relationships – Little hierarchy, much opportunity for everyone to take on responsibility for different parts of the project. During the project there were five full team meetings, three conference calls, with other ‘sub-meetings’.

**Supplier development projects identified by the buyers** – To ensure that the project focused on areas that were definitely important to them, to help ensure greater engagement and ‘buy-in’.

### Detailed steps to achieve aims & objectives

- **Initial one-to-one meetings with key buyers** – To discuss the project objectives and engage them with the process.

### **Data collection**

- **1st data request** (late August) - To provide information about quantities purchased of different food types, in order to identify the key opportunities. Although the data was useful and employed later in the supplier development projects, it required considerable time and effort by the buyers to produce it.
- **New data gathering process** - Following on from the first buyer workshop, we drew up a new process for gathering the data – now primarily financial (see **Appendix I**) – following feedback from procurement staff on a draft version. Because most of the organizations did not keep information about their supplies in the form required, we needed to obtain it from their distributors. Everyone involved in the November workshop gave the team authority to ask their distributors to provide this data. With this authority, we held meetings with all the key distributors to talk through the project, what data we needed and why we were asking them to provide it. Although it took a while in some cases for distributors to respond, ultimately every distributor assisted in the data collection process and provided information vital to the project.

### **Procurement Group Workshops**

**1st workshop, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2010** - To introduce procurement staff from different organizations in Plymouth, confirm their definition of ‘local’, present the data collected so far, gain their consent and support for further data collection and identify the key issues which the supplier development projects should address

**2nd workshop, 11<sup>th</sup> Jan 2011** – To provide an update on the data collection process, with group discussion to shape the delivery of the supplier development projects, including the supplier

workshops to be held on 1<sup>st</sup> February. The project team presented a summary of supplier technical accreditations - with a focus on Safe Local Supplier Approval (SALSA)<sup>3</sup> – as requested at the 2<sup>nd</sup> November Workshop (**Appendix II**). There was a presentation about the forthcoming ‘Sustainable Food City: Plymouth’ (SFCP) event on 17<sup>th</sup> February to discuss the programme and opportunity for the buyers to book meetings with suppliers on the day. The buyers suggested contacts to invite and also gave guidance on the type of produce they were interested in.

**3rd workshop, 22nd March** - Final project workshop gave an opportunity to review the project delivery and outcomes, including: review of the SFCP event, presentation of final procurement data results and discussion of the potential for another data collection/analysis in 2011. There was discussion about the future of the group with consensus that there was value in its continuation.

### Supplier development projects (**Appendix III**)

Three sustainable supply chain projects were developed - based on evidence gathered from the buyer and distributor meetings, data collection and first buyer workshop:

- **Fresh fruit & vegetable supply through wholesalers /distributors** - To explore procurement opportunities and availability issues, with the potential to stimulate the supply base to better understand and thereby meet the needs of the public sector buyers via the wholesaler/distributor network
- **Dairy produce** - To explore potential opportunities for greater local sourcing of secondary dairy produce (other than milk), working within existing contracts and maximising collaborative working opportunities
- **Supply2Plymouth (S2P)<sup>4</sup>** - To promote greater usage of this existing e-procurement portal by both buyers and suppliers.

### ‘Sustainable Food City: Plymouth’ event (**Appendix IV**)

- This ambitious and successful final project event combined a ‘meet the buyer, supplier’ function with the launch of the new Plymouth Food Charter (**Appendix V**), which had been developed by the stakeholder group during the course of the project. Around 150 delegates attended, from a range of public, private and third sector organizations from across the city. This included 23 food suppliers and 8 public procurement buyers, providing an ideal meeting place to help facilitate the process.
- Key note speaker Dr Roberta Sonnino from Cardiff University gave a broader context to the event outlining a range of international work and best practice to support and develop urban food strategies and sustainable food procurement (*copies of all presentations from the event can be found at [www.foodplymouth.org](http://www.foodplymouth.org)*)
- To encourage wider awareness and engagement with both buyers and suppliers, Sell2Plymouth (S2P) had a stand at the SFCP event with registrations taking place on the day. There was an afternoon workshop session with a S2P presentation by Jenny Bushrod, Director of the Office of Procurement and Sustainability at the University of Plymouth, to highlight how and why to use it. Other presentations from a Buyer (Brad Pearce, Plymouth

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<sup>3</sup> SALSA is a new supplier approval scheme designed to help local and regional food and drink producers supply their products to national and regional buyers. [www.salsafood.co.uk/](http://www.salsafood.co.uk/)

<sup>4</sup> The Sell 2 Plymouth [<http://www.sell2plymouth.co.uk/>] is the e-portal for public sector contracts of under £25,000 total value in the city of Plymouth, and was established in June 2009. It is a partnership between Plymouth’s public sector buyers and local support agencies, as well as both the Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses. Sell 2 Plymouth is intended to be a one-stop ‘shop’, or e-marketplace, facilitating SMEs to sell to the public sector in Plymouth. Over 2,000 suppliers are registered on the site but it is not yet being widely used by food suppliers.

City Council (PCC) and supplier (Bill Clarke, Trewithen Farm) further underlined how and why it should be used and the benefits from doing so.

- To support wider awareness and engagement with sustainable food production and procurement another workshop featured practical advice from the Soil Association on their Food for Life Catering Mark<sup>5</sup>  
[www.soilassociation.org/Trade/Catering/tabid/1286/Default.aspx](http://www.soilassociation.org/Trade/Catering/tabid/1286/Default.aspx) and Duchy College about their Clear About Carbon project <http://www.clearaboutcarbon.com>
- Cookery demonstrations were also held to showcase opportunities for public sector caterers to use a range of local and sustainable produce within their kitchens and budgets
- The University (UoP), NHS and PCC all publicly confirmed their commitment to the Plymouth Food Charter at the event. Delegates were also encouraged to make commitments to help deliver new activity to support the Plymouth Food Charter on the day – with over 20 organisations doing so – for details of these see [www.foodplymouth.org](http://www.foodplymouth.org)

**Urban centres research report (Appendix VI)** A review of public procurement local food supply in other urban centres in the South West of England was carried out to provide a regional context and benchmark for the Plymouth Food Procurement project (PFPP).

### Details of outcomes achieved

**Data collection** - We were able to determine market size and measures of existing local supply and to propose how to simplify and maintain the data collection process.

**Functioning procurement group** - The buyers engaged actively throughout the project and intend to continue meeting as a group past this project life-span.

**Three practical sustainable supply chain development projects – Appendix III** - *three accompanying project case studies which detail the process and outcomes of these.*

**Active stakeholder group** - The cross sector city wide stakeholder group met four times during the project, to develop the ‘Sustainable Food City: Plymouth’ partnership and new Plymouth Food Charter. Unfortunately the Soil Association led Big Lottery bid for this initiative was not successful; however the group still wanted to proceed with the partnership and launch of new Plymouth Food Charter. This group are committed to continuing to meet for the next financial year to develop an action plan to help underpin delivery of this Charter and embed commitment to it’s delivery within the partner organizations and other key stakeholders across the city.

### No of businesses / organizations involved (Appendix VII)

- The stakeholder group is made up of 12 organisations with approx 18 individuals from these meeting quarterly, there are also a significant number of others who are kept informed of progress although not actively involved in the group.
- The procurement group is made up of 11 different public sector organizations and contract caterers, with an average of 15 individuals who attended the project workshops.
- There were 22 different suppliers in total who exhibited at the SFCP, 10 businesses

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<sup>5</sup>The Food for Life Catering Mark is open to all types of caterer and offers three awards to recognise best practice: bronze, silver and gold. The different awards offer a step-by-step approach towards using more fresh, seasonal, local and organic ingredients.

attended our supply development workshops.

## Collaboration

- **Buyer procurement group** - worked with us to provide: initial data, consent to get information from the distributors and to attend three workshops during the project
- **Plymouth Procurement Forum** - to obtain support and cooperation for project aims and objectives
- **Stakeholder group** - to develop the Plymouth Food Charter and launch at the SFCP event
- **Suppliers / distributors** - participated in the supplier development workshops and at the SFCP event
- **Tamar Grow Local** <http://www.tamargrowlocal.org/> – we have shared project data and learning to help achieve our mutual objectives of increasing local and sustainable food supply into the city, with two steering group members on the stakeholder group
- **South West Food and Drink** – the project funders were supportive throughout, providing practical ‘hands-on’ support eg. use of supplier database, attending workshops and stakeholder meetings, admin and PR support for SFCP event, as well as encouraging collaboration and learning with the other DSFC projects.

## Lessons learned

- **Project file sharing facility Officezilla.com** – the aim was to provide easy and secure file access and sharing. In the event, it was taking too much time to maintain so its use was discontinued.
- **Email banner** - with hindsight we should have made an email banner with text and logo’s for all team members to use with for all emails for the project. It would have reinforced the team’s identity in the eyes of people we were working with, given that all team members were using their own email addresses.
- **Cultivate the supplier base earlier** – we should have started this work in the autumn, possibly combining it with an early Sell2Plymouth event. This could have alerted the supplier network to the project and reduce the effort and resource expended later to engage them in the supplier workshops and the Feb 17 event. However we initially made the decision to contact suppliers only once we had a clear lead on the opportunities from the procurement data and meetings with the buyers and wholesalers. *NB We did however still manage to get a good quality and range of suppliers to engage with the development projects and SFCP event.*
- **Time required for data collection and collation** – a thorough and detailed process which took significantly longer than anticipated. This could have been reduced by defining the right categories for collection from the outset.

## Recommendations and next steps

- The cross sector city wide stakeholder group will continue to meet, with facilitation support from the Soil Association (SA) jointly funded by project sponsors (SA, UoP, PCC, NHS), with the primary aim of developing an action plan to support the delivery of the Plymouth Food Charter and to promote wider awareness and commitment to it across the city. A website [www.foodplymouth.org](http://www.foodplymouth.org) e-newsletter, twitter and Facebook portals have now been set up to help support and develop this work.
- The collective of public sector organisations have confirmed their intention to continue meeting on a quarterly basis for the next financial year and to continue to work collaboratively on local sourcing, with the aim of continuing some of the key project work, albeit at a reduced level.
- The organisations who signed up to the Plymouth Food Charter and made pledges on local sourcing will progress within their individual organisations, supported by the website [www.foodplymouth.org](http://www.foodplymouth.org)
- The University of Plymouth will continue to host the Sell2Plymouth portal and will endeavour to address identified issues to make it more user friendly – this will provide local suppliers with an

opportunity to register, to raise their profile and to be more aware of potential public sector tendering opportunities.

- The Plymouth City Procurement Forum will also continue and presents opportunities for more local sourcing beyond the public sector.

## **Conclusions**

This nine month project delivered an effective and complex programme of delivery and outputs. There is a still a strong momentum within the stakeholder and procurement group, who both have committed to continue some of the key project activities during this next financial year, with facilitation support from the Soil Association. Through the workshops, SFCP event and other supplier development work the project has delivered some real value to the public sector organizations and local food suppliers who engaged with it. Whilst the newly established city wide stakeholder group and Plymouth Food Charter, are helping to drive and embed new activity and commitment towards helping Plymouth to become a 'truly sustainable food city'.

## **REFERENCES & CONTACT DETAILS**

### **Project Team Members:**

Roy Heath, Cornwall NHS Trust  
Traci Lewis, Soil Association  
Wendy Miller, University of Plymouth researcher  
Peter Redstone, Barefoot Partnership Ltd  
Judith Ward, Food Consultant

### **For all enquiries contact:**

#### **Soil Association**

Traci Lewis, [tlewis@soilassociation.org](mailto:tlewis@soilassociation.org)  
M 07870 268654

#### **The Barefoot Partnership Ltd**

Peter Redstone [peter@barefoot-thinking.com](mailto:peter@barefoot-thinking.com)  
M 07967 808923

#### **South West Food and Drink (SWFD)**

Nick Cork [Nick.Cork@southwestfoodanddrink.com](mailto:Nick.Cork@southwestfoodanddrink.com)

SWFD is a strategic, private sector-led organisation at the forefront of driving forward the sector at all levels. It works with the food and drink chain – from the producer through to the trade end user – to help it to do better business and in turn generate more jobs and build a stronger local economy. SWFD identifies need and opportunity to develop and improve business performance within the sector and works to design and fund the projects that do this. For more information, please see <http://www.southwestfoodanddrink.com/>