



This short food chain supplement is published by the Agricultural and Rural Convention 2020, which attended the Food From Here one-day conference at Coventry University on July 3, 2013. Speakers at the Technocentre included EU Commission policy officer Branka Tome (inset, above left) and keynote speaker Tim Lang (inset, left).

<http://www.coventry.ac.uk/cafs>

Local food is gathering European momentum

Across Europe, the role of local food producers is gaining recognition as a key component in successful regional economies. This has the potential to be an inclusive vision and bring a distinctive notion of sustainability to mainstream thinking about food supply chains.

For this to happen, European policies will need to be flexible enough to reflect regional diversity but sufficiently cogent to meet the underlying need to feed populations more sustainably than is currently the case. This is particularly important for urban populations, which currently depend on long-haul food chain paradigms to exist.

The European Commission is responding to the concerns raised by a number of stakeholders in its efforts to develop an identity for local food that meets these priorities. The problem it faces is not that of finding a lowest common denominator for policymaking, but identifying the shared traits of a short food chain which make it a preferred option for all concerned.

A frequent observation at the Food From Here conference, organised by the Centre for Agroecology and Food Security (CAFS) in July 2013, was that there is a lack of data to inform such a transition. Conventional economic measures are more often than not blind to wider environmental issues: this is the basis of many arguments for full-cost accounting.

In January 2014, the European Commission will be publishing an account of its progress with defining the essential qualities that distinguish local food from other foods. Delegates to the conference heard from some of the researchers who contributed to the European Commission's research request: they are presented here to bring the debate to a wider European audience.

Growing shares

Members of the Five Acre Community Farm can sign up for a full weekly share of fresh vegetables for £10/week or a half share for £6/week. Sharing subscribers collect their vegetable shares from the site on set days every week, in addition to their basic membership access to regular social events and opportunities to take part in the growing. Everyone has a say in the running of the farm.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) means just that at Five Acres: members also join in with the work of growing the crops. "When you've got half a field to weed, having 50 people on the job makes what would otherwise be a week's work happen in an afternoon," organiser Gareth Davies explains to the Food From Here pre-conference field trip. Davies organises another CSA project in nearby Leamington Spa.

He argues that grant-funding means that projects start with a sense of false security: "When the grants run out, groups either struggle or fold," he observes. Working like any other farming venture without funds to fall back on focuses groups on making economic use of resources.

The Five Acres CSA started in 2012 and operates on land leased from Garden Organic at Ryton Gardens, near Coventry. There are around 60 full-share equivalents, with some spare capacity.

<http://www.fiveacrefarm.org.uk/>



Five Acre Community Farm organiser Gareth Davies took Food From Here speakers around the site.

Short food chains



Farm shop and restaurant create all-year local jobs

As early as July, Maggie Ellis is fielding requests for Christmas Day menus at Hilltop Farm in Warwickshire, where three farming families run a shop, café and restaurant all round the year. What started in the 1980s as direct sales of asparagus from her back door and on local markets, is now a thriving farming and food business that has created local jobs.

“About 20% of the stock in our shop comes from a 30 mile (50km) radius,” she explains to the Food From Here pre-conference field trip. Hilltop Farm <http://www.hilltopfarmshop.com> is a successful short food supply chain business with traditional farming roots.

Maggie’s customers value the direct contact with farming and the farm’s location on an old Roman road, the Fosse Way, brings in many passing customers on their way to more distant destinations. “We get people going out of their way just to break their journey for tea in our café,” Maggie told the Food From Here speakers.

The farming business, which includes beef and sheep, extends over 120 hectares, with a further 240 hectares of rented land. “When the BSE crisis came along, we found that people really did want

to know where their meat came from. What is more, when you compare like with like, we are not particularly expensive alongside the supermarkets. In fact, our beef mince is often better quality and value than supermarket mince.”

Away from a retail environment obsessed with sell by dates, customers can see for themselves the difference between authentic British beef and what is sold in city centre supermarkets: “Our beef hangs for 21 days and isn’t bright red like the plastic supermarket packs,” Maggie explains.

She works hard to make the farm outlet a one-stop shop for customers planning a meal. They will find basic cooking ingredients like salt alongside fresh produce, an extensive cheese and dairy range, eggs and a fully-stocked butchery. All this and non-food essentials like kitchen towel save a further trip with a supermarket trolley. It’s called a one-stop shop, but the view from the car park is rural.

“We routinely ask customers if there is anything on their list that we didn’t have on the shelves,” she adds. It is part of always being there for her customers: the farm opens seven days a week and even opens on Christmas day to serve those festive lunches that customers are queuing to book.

50 years supporting organic gardeners

For half a century now, Garden Organic (formerly the Henry Doubleday Research Association) [1] has been supporting a growing number of organic gardeners, schools and professional horticulturists. For many of its 30,000 home gardening members, Garden Organic is a bridge to producing food.

For a number of reasons, home gardening cannot be described as organic, which is something of an itch for CAFS staff member Dr Margi Lennartsson, who is based at Garden Organic. “For years, we’ve been trying to find a workable description that will let us use the word ‘organic,’” she told ARC, but without certification of the land there is no way to reclaim the word ‘organic’ for domestic food growers or Community Supported Agriculture (CSA).

Among other things, Lennartsson has been working on the Big Gather event on July 13, which marks a high point for the 200 community projects that have been funded through the Central Warwickshire

Villages LEADER programme [2]. The celebration includes opportunities for visitors to try woodland crafts and learn about local bee and pig clubs, which have been funded through the Pillar II LEADER rural development programme.

This event takes place at Ryton Gardens, which is also home to the Heritage Seed Library, a national resource for heritage seeds [3]. This network supports over 7,000 members, some of whom put seeds back, says manager Neil Munro.

To accommodate EU seed regulations, subscribers pay for a membership, which comes with free seeds. The Heritage Seed Library sends out about 30,000 packs of heritage variety seeds every season.

[1] <http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/>

[2] <http://www.warwickshireleader.net/>

[3] <http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/hsl/index.php>

Short food chains



Coventry hosts European local food conference

The UK Centre for Agroecology and Food Security (CAFS) in Coventry this month hosted a conference on short food chains in Europe. It was addressed by international speakers from France, Hungary and Holland, as well as UK short food chain experts.

Opening the conference, CAFS director Michel Pimbert warns that: "The bad news is coming in thick and fast," referring to long distance food scandals like the recent horsemeat débâcle. The European Commission has been studying short food chains, for which CAFS has published a Europe-wide study of short food chain projects with a view to establishing cross-border sharing of knowledge in the field.



photo: Ilona Pimbert.

Dr Michel Pimbert

Lead researcher, Dr Moya Kneafsey, presents an overview of the report Short Food Supply Chains and Local Food Systems in

the EU [1], which sets out to inform the debate about whether there should be an EU local food label. The research team makes a distinction between local food systems and Short Food Supply Chains (SFSC), since local food defies easy definitions with a number of national interpretations of the concept.

"There is a wealth of case studies, but a lack of comparative studies," Kneafsey explains. The result is a lack of robust data that could be used as a benchmark for the economic impact or other aspects of SFSC.

Dr Damian Maye, associate professor of Countryside and Community Research at the University of the West of England, told that delegates SFSC are not just for rural



Dr Moya Kneafsey

communities, either.

"We need to extend SFSC structures beyond the rural context," he argues.

He outlines three broad categories that he had encountered during research for the Countryside and Community Research Institute. The paradigms are face-to-face models; proxy selling through outlets like farm shops and remote selling online. "Fixing products to places recentres farmers in the process," Maye observes. SFSC schemes are sidelined in the context of mainstream food security debates. "The dismissive view of local food is a missed opportunity," he adds, suggesting that SFSC should include a mix of community projects.

Through the UK's Local Food [2] programme, more than 500 food projects have received funding ranging from £2000 to half a million. Many of these are urban and periurban projects: "Cities are the start, not the end," he notes.

Maye takes issue with food security rhetoric based on calories, too. "People don't just eat calories!" he exclaims. "Just because a project doesn't turn out tonnes of carrots, [that] doesn't diminish its value."

SFSC have broad range of motivations among supporters, too, adds Kneafsey, responding to a question from the floor. She notes a wide range of motivations within project memberships. "Individual members of a Community Supported Agriculture



photo: Coventry University

Greeting delegates on behalf of Coventry University, Vice-Chancellor Professor Madeleine Atkins outlines the four broad strands that run through the work of CAFS. These are Food and Communities; Agroecological Technologies; Stabilisation Agriculture, as well as Policies and Institutions for Food Security. "Coventry University is reaching out for partners in research projects covering these four areas," she declares. The history of the city has included a commitment to peace and reconciliation as a necessary part of the process of rebuilding civil society, she adds.

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[1] http://agrilife.jrc.ec.europa.eu/documents/SFSCChainFinaleditedreport_001.pdf

[2] <http://www.localfoodgrants.org/>



'local is a powerful word'

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(CSA) project may not be setting out to change the world, even if the organisers of that particular CSA do want to change the world."

The glue that holds local food projects together is a commitment to a notion of 'local' without requiring a rigid definition of what that might entail. "Local is a powerful word," Kneafsey warns.

Speaking on behalf of the European Commission, policy officer in the agricultural product quality unit Branka Tome tells delegates that the commission has been aware for some while that small farmers are "falling through a gap in the net to promote quality schemes." For a number of reasons, regional quality schemes and *appellations* favour larger businesses.

"The member states and the European Parliament have asked the commission to present a report on the case for a new local farming and direct sales labelling scheme. Around the same time, the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions called on the commission to propose measures for short food supply chains and local food markets.

"We have consulted various stakeholders and commissioned research," she explains, adding that a CAFS report had been successfully completed. This points to inevitable gaps in data, arising in part from a clear definition of local food. The availability of local food around the EU varies widely in any measurable form: in the absence of clear definitions, estimates suggest that local food production might range from 2% - 3% by conventional measurements.

However, interest in local food has been revived by successive food crises in recent years: "...it is a reply of consumers to social responsibility," Tome explains, adding that the benefits of SFSC are more than the sum total of local food produced, however that might be determined. "It gives farmers a better share of the final price; for consumers there is more interest in getting food locally."

Tome's unit is working with a special expert working group. There has always been scope for SFSC projects in Pillar II rural development measures and the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) will have specific measures that to support such projects, with an SFSC sub-programme that will be available during the coming CAP phase. This is expected to come with an additional 10% in co-funding from the EU, so that member states would match fund 40% of these measures, that member states would decide for

themselves. "A label for local food is not a done deal, we are still working on it," Tome observes, adding that her unit will be reporting back in early January.

'...not a done deal...'

"We are not looking for another certification system, nor another logo." The likely framework would have a 'light' touch, using existing controls to manage quality issues. The objectives are to balance credibility for consumers with costs to farmers."

With a high proportion of postwar smallholdings, Hungary has retained a strong local food culture and there is a political will to develop SFSC, says researcher Bálint Balázs. The political agenda "...has opened up possibilities for bottom-up initiatives," in a country where 86% of the land is devoted to agriculture and forestry, yet agriculture accounts for 5% of the formal GDP.

Closer relations with consumers would be one way in which farmers in Hungary could ensure their profitability and ensure that household spending on food, currently around one third, stays in the local economy. SFSC schemes are seen as a bulwark against a rising tide of European corporate agriculture.

Presenting a study of the Szekszárd county, which straddles the Transdanubian hills and the Great Plains, Balázs explains that this area has a very stable rural population, of which one third consumes only local food and a quarter routinely buy organic foods. There is a paradox, he adds, in that this is an avowedly traditional community, but radical for all that. He identifies a need for quantifiable evidence and new knowledge, for a region where local values are promoted without stating any confrontational opposition to larger scale developments.

In the Netherlands, local food is at the heart of a growing number of radical and innovative schemes, explains Jan Willem van der Schans. A senior researcher at the Agricultural Economics Research Institute of Wageningen University, he works on bringing sustainability into urban food chains.

Dutch cities are inviting farmers back to grow local food on hundreds of hectares of land that had previously been earmarked for non-agricultural uses. As a result, there are growing numbers of pop-up farmers' markets at a local level and retail



Branka Tome



Bálint Balázs

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Dr Jan Willem van der Schans

developments such as a local food area within a supermarket chain and the Marqt format farm shop retail chain.

On his way to Coventry, he photographed a local food outlet in Schiphol airport, selling food grown on parcels of land previously designated for future airport expansion. Local food platforms in the Netherlands can include recycling, such as a venture that recycles

spent coffee grounds into oyster (*pleurotus*) mushrooms.

From Rotterdam, van der Schans presents examples of combined local food outlets and restaurants that have been successfully established. By way of a challenge to the alternative food visions, there are high street outlets offering 'slow food fast' catering for a mainstream clientèle.

There is no compromising on quality for Farmers Fayre <http://www.farmersfayre.co.uk/> managing director Nicola Reece, who builds her business on seasonal and local food through her combined farm shops and restaurants. "If you don't buy a carrot from the shop, you are likely to buy it as part of a carrot cake or in a stew in the restaurant!" she laughs.

Returning from a local food lunch, delegates hear from the person who brought it to the table. Reece defines local as 30 miles for staple foods and would worry if she could not source good bread, milk and fresh produce within that range. She runs a combined farm



Nicola Reece

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Challenging food waste on the campus

CAFS post graduate researcher Jordon Lazell has been surprised by the extent to which food waste is invisible around the Coventry campus. "Unlike other environmental gestures, I find a lack of engagement over food waste issues."

The campus has a population of more than 20,000, plus 300 staff. They have a supermarket, three franchised coffee bars and half a dozen canteens and foodservice outlets, operated by a private contractor.

"According to figures from WRAP, like any other comparable university, Coventry generated just over seven tonnes of food waste last year. Every tonne of food waste is equivalent to 3.8 tonnes of carbon dioxide."

Lazell tweets alerts about surplus food at a meeting or an event, for students to come and help to polish off surpluses. During the Food From Here local lunch, for instance, at the end of the meal he tweets campus followers to let them know that there is food available for anyone within reach of the conference building.

Unlike paper waste, for which detailed studies have been done, there is a gap in the ownership of food waste across departments. Some staff might remember to tweet the campus if they have surplus sandwiches in a meeting, but once the catering contractors come to clear up, food regulations mean that they will dispose of surpluses rather than try to find alternative outlets for them. The Trim Trax food waste disposal points around the campus makes waste food measurable .

Focus group meetings attract committed environmentalists but have relatively little traction with mainstream campus users. There is a need to go beyond telling people about food waste and challenge current practices in an informed way. "Food waste hasn't been researched much from a social point of view," observes Lazell.



Jordon Lazell

'CAP needs to be food policy'

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shop and restaurant at Stoneleigh Park, home to the UK's Royal Show: at any time in the year there are more than 2,000 people working on the site, including the staff at the National Farmers' Union head office.

Nearer to her Coventry roots, Reece has a Farmers Fayre branch in the Leekes retail Coventry store, which she describes as: "a big learning curve." It is obviously a successful move, since as she speaks she is just days away from opening in a second Leekes outlet in Melksham. The success with Leekes also proves that quality food production exists at local level and is good enough for premium retailers to see its value.

In France, direct selling was largely ignored by the government until the turn of the century, according to INRA researcher Yuna Chiffoleau. At that time, food scares across Europe sparked a closer interest in promoting short food chains with one intermediary.

As a result, France's agricultural census figures now includes data on short food chains. At the last count, one in five French farms is involved in one or more of 20 categories of short food chain, Chiffoleau explains. "There were big expectations of the 2009 Barnier Plan," which was going to promote local sourcing by local authorities, regional administrations and public bodies, she adds.

French researchers still have a number of unresolved questions on short food chains. "There are still many clichés applied to short food chain farmers," Chiffoleau adds, not all of which will be answered by the current "...mantra..." that short food chains will provide a transition for agroecology.

Across France, she explains, domestic spending power takes the edge off the appeal of local food against artificially and cheaply-priced industrial food. The uptake of local food is lower among lower and middle income groups: "the image has to change," Chiffoleau warns.

"What is food for?" asks keynote speaker Dr Tim Lang, professor of Food Policy at the Centre for Food Policy in London's City University. The UK view of food, he explains, is that food is "fuel" but that local food is about "implanting identity."

So what is the state of food thinking? he asks. "We're dealing with a crisis in *productionism*, which is systemic." He distinguishes productionism, which has its roots in the industrialisation of northern European food production during the 1920s and 1930s, from French postwar *productivisme*, which was a reconstruction drive.

"This new word productionism perplexed some people when Michael Heasman and I first coined the

term in Food Wars back in 2004. We're spelling out why we did this in more detail in the 2nd edition we're now doing."

We wanted the term productionism to capture what was happened throughout the whole food economy not just the land even though farmers are now only a small sector in that more complex and longer food chain. In the UK, farmers contribute only 9% to the value of the agri-food sector, according to DEFRA figures [1]. Most money is made off the land. Defra is sometimes unhappy when I point this out but it's their figures.

The CAP, Lang argues, "now needs to be a food policy and not just an agricultural policy." Consumers are locked into cheaply-priced food, he argues, adding that local food cannot compete on price. "We need to establish what is a sustainable diet is. I'd like the Office of National Statistics to do this, and it be linked to pensions and benefits." Lang also wants less focus on agriculture and more on horticulture. "It's plants not meat we need to expand." He also argues for action on rural jobs. "Tesco et al and their profits dwarf what farmers in the UK make." Why, Lang asks, is the food sector characterised by low wages yet high profits off the land?

Then, provocatively, he asks: "Can Tesco be a local food supplier?" Some big retailers have highly developed niche 'local' markets. But is localness the key issue? He suggests analysts of the food system need to give more attention to where the money goes. "Follow the money," is the rule, as that's where the power lies. Lang is on the record for summarising the default UK government food policy as: "...leave it all to Tesco et al". There are moments where this reflex breaks down - BSE, the 2007-08

commodity price spike - and when outside pressures shift politicians' unhappiness to get involved in food policy. Obesity was one in the mid 2000s. Food Poverty ought to be rocking the complacency now, but isn't, alas.

As a former commissioner serving on the UK government's Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) Lang issued

Professor Tim Lang



'What is food for..?'

Short food chains



repeated warnings that food policy was (and still is to this day) at best inadequate and at worst, positively dangerous. He want "...a more imaginative approach to European policymaking," too.

His final report a week before the SDC was closed down in spring 2011 was *Looking Back, Looking Forward* [1]: "...sustainability means more than just carbon and climate change. Those are critical issues, of course, but the vulnerability and unsustainability of current intensive food production also includes

biodiversity loss, water stress, international relations, inequalities in diet, and social affordability. And while these indicators show progress in the wrong direction, the imperative is to produce even more food for even more people while mitigating the negative sustainability impacts."

Lang also wrote, in 2011, that the UK government has followed delusional economic dogma, imagining that food challenges could somehow be met with the mantra of market forces.

The dominance of neo-liberal thinking, only one school of Economists, should not be allowed to airbrush inconvenient economic realities out of the national food economic landscape, he suggests. Sometimes, Lang despairs at politicians' collective failure to get a grip on food policy. Why must it wait for a crisis?

There are tricky issues facing food policy, Lang said. Today, many food companies now accept that sustainability is a big challenge. But how to address it? Simply as 'lower fat and lower carbon'? or more comprehensively as the

SDC proposed. He refers to a table on page 14 of *Looking Back, Looking Forward*, which lists half a dozen broad categories and sub-headings that he thinks any decent food policy must address to be anywhere near sustainable. Initially, both politicians and industry "all glazed over. It's too complex. The 'leave it to Tesco' reflex kicked in.

Now, a few years later, industry think-tanks like the Institute of Grocery Distribution (IGD) is working on just such complex 'omni-standards' or 'poly-value' indicators. A new version launches in October."

"We in the public interest and academic research world have to think big and long-term, as industry but alas not often governments do," Lang explains. "Today, more people in finance and business see big trouble coming." They're right, Lang thinks.

"But their version of what to do about it must be held up to scrutiny. That's why we too need to get our thoughts together first. This is another phase in the long process of answering the question 'what is food for?' And what is a good food system?"

'Finance sees big trouble coming.'

Professor Tim Lang



Quality	Social values
Taste Seasonality Cosmetic Fresh (where appropriate) Authenticity/provenance	Pleasure Identity Animal welfare Equality and justice Trust Choice Skills (for food citizenship)
Environment	Health
Climate change Water Land use Soil Biodiversity Waste reduction	Safety Nutrition Equal access Availability Social status/affordability Information and education
Economy	Governance
Food security and resilience Affordability (price) Efficiency True competition and fair returns Jobs, skills and decent working conditions Fully internalised costs	Science and technology evidence base Transparency Democratic accountability Ethical values (fairness) International aid and development

[1] This table appears on page 14 of Sustainable Development Commission's *Looking Back, Looking Forward*. <http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications.php?id=1187> published March 2011



Salad days at Five Acre Community Farm: freshly-picked crops are collected from the site by subscribing members, who pay £10 a week for a full share or £6 for a half share

Hilltop Farm shop has everything necessary to cook a meal from start to finish: no need to make additional trips to supermarkets.



Local lunch supplied by Farmers Fayre. The buying is done on quality first, then proximity. Managing director Nicola Reece reckons to cover basic lines within a 30-mile (50km) radius.

Some of the freeform feedback from the day's workshops.



Words and pictures for ARC2020 by UK web correspondent, Peter Crosskey (peter@crosskey.co.uk), who gratefully acknowledges additional input and material from Professor Tim Lang and Coventry University. The Agricultural and Rural Convention is an EU-level group of NGOs: further details can be found at <http://www.arc2020.eu/front/contact/>

'Wine is bottled poetry'

Robert Louis Stephenson

Food From Here delegates finished their visit to Coventry with a guided tasting of English wines, led by Dr Steve Smith. With more than 400 commercial vineyards in the UK, there is more to choose from than some visitors might have expected.

There are almost 1,500 hectares of vines in England, many of them in the south, where chalky soils and well-drained sedimentary formations can be found. However: "They go as far north as York and as far west as Wales. We have even been promised Scottish wine from Fife in 2014," Smith explains to delegates.

The current phase of English wine production goes back to the 1950s, when German and French varieties were grown for white wines. In 1984 about a third of the vines planted were Müller-Thurgau, but by 2011, there were substantial plantings of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir in modern UK vineyards, which now accounts for just over half the UK's production, Smith informs his audience.

The good news for local food lovers is that with nearly 1,500 hectares of commercial vines, the UK is in a position to complement locally-produced food with modest quantities of UK-produced wine, often sold directly.

Smith warns against eating cheese while tasting wine, since this fills out any faults in the flavour notes: small slices of apple are a more reliable way to keep a palate clear. "Sell on cheese, but buy on apple," he adds, with a smile.



Dr Steve Smith gets ready to serve up his wine expertise.