



Regional Food Group – going for growth

Northumbria Larder has formed a partnership with the North East Chamber of Commerce (NECC) and Improve - the Sector Skills Council for Food and Drink Manufacturing and Processing across the UK - to become North East England's new Regional Food Group (RFG).

The newly formed consortium is tasked with transforming the region's food and drink economy after One NorthEast awarded them with a £2million four-year contract.



They will be responsible for assisting businesses and increasing consumer awareness and availability of a wide range of quality regional and local produce delivering significant growth in regionally produced food and drink sales.

The RFG will engage with 200 related businesses and organisations, help to create over 250 new jobs and oversee training and development activity resulting in 900 employees in the sector gaining enhanced skills.

The Agency is committed to seeing regional produce increase its market share of total food and drink sales in the region and believes that after joining forces the three organisations are best placed to deliver the ambitions of the Strategy for Regionally Produced Food and Drink in North East England, launched last November. The consortium will build on a track record of successful work to promote regional food and drink, including:

- The organisation of 21 regional and national events in 2006, generating over £1m in sales of regional produce.
- Helping ASDA with regional sourcing for its stores in North East England (approx £1m in 2006) and working with 15 producers to supply newly-opened Waitrose stores
- Liaising with trainers to run technical and commercial courses and around 150 technical and commercial visits to regional food producers
- Working with eight regional colleges to raise the profile of regional food and

- support menu development
- More than 700 media features on regional food

Boosting tourism is also on the agenda for the RFG, who will work with Made in Northumberland in order to raise the profile of regional food. Made in Northumberland is a one year demonstration project that One NorthEast is funding through the Single Programme via Northumberland Strategic Partnership.

Together with the RFG they are working to build supply chains and enhance the offering of local food and drink to visitors to Northumberland and ultimately learn lessons for the wider region.

A Growing Interest in Locally Produced Food

From tomatoes spilling over on balconies to leeks sprouting up on roundabouts - Middlesbrough has gone potty over planting in recent months.

As part of the Designs of the time (Dott 07) initiative, One NorthEast has part-funded the innovative Urban Farming project based in Middlesbrough. Dott 07 (Designs of the time 2007) is a year of community projects, events and exhibitions in North East England that explore what life in a sustainable region could be like and how design can help us get there. Over the last month hundreds of people who live and work in Middlesbrough and the Tees Valley have been planting a wide range of fruit and vegetables in various containers across the town ranging from window boxes to the front of MIMA (Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art). Local horticulturalists, allotment growers, farmers and food producers have also been helping by providing advice and guidance in a mentoring role.



Between June and September 2007, members of this army of new 'urban farmers' are bringing their harvested ingredients to 'kitchen playground' events: three week-long blocks of activity in which people will prepare, cook and eat dishes based on raw ingredients that they are growing. A headline playground event will be hosted by a national and local chef and the recipes created by both the chefs and local residents will be distributed as postcards across the Tees Valley. A strong message about healthier eating underpins all of these activities.

In September 2007, a banquet for 300 will take place in Middlesbrough's main square. The meal will be created from produce harvested by people taking part in the project and use some of the recipes from the 'kitchen playgrounds'. Distinct dishes will be created in the open air by groups of local people with the experience enriched by meat and vegetables supplied by local producers. A market will also take place alongside the meal.

The Urban Farming project will be showcased to the region in October 2007 as part of the Dott 07 Festival in Baltic Square, Gateshead Quayside. This event will promote the advantages of growing and buying locally produced food and demonstrate the need for improved urban and rural linkages in the food chain so that the lessons learnt in Middlesbrough can be shared by all.

North East Red Meat Industry Task Group

Red meat is a key sector for the region's land-based economy.

The Sustainable Farming and Food Strategy (SFFS) is a long term vision aimed at putting the farming and food industry on the same footing as all other major industries in North East England, contributing to a better environment and healthier and prosperous communities.

As part of this strategy, the North East Red Meat Industry Task Group was set up two years ago. The group is responsible for driving forward an agreed action plan designed to add or retain value for the region, research export opportunities, stimulate integration of the red meat supply chain and improve inefficiencies within livestock production and the supply chain.



To drive forward these changes Warren Butterworth has been unveiled as its new chairman. The farmer's son, who has been in the industry for 40 years, says he is determined to raise the group's profile and ensure farmers in the region are well positioned to face the challenges and opportunities post Common Agricultural Policy reform.

Sam Jones is also the group's new Industry Development Co-ordinator who will ensure the day to day running of projects come to fruition.

The Task Group has an Industry Board comprising representatives from farmers, abattoirs, Hexham Mart, Regional Food Group, Tynedale Council, EBLEX and the National Farmers Union among others.

Sub-groups are set up to consider various projects as and when needed such as looking at addressing the issues of wool profitability and supply chain mapping. Warren and Sam are also working on the Swedish Export Project, which is aiming to establish whether there is potentially a viable new market opportunity for North East beef and lamb in Sweden.

Mature Lamb update

One of the projects that the Red Meat Industry Task Group has also been working on is establishing whether there's a gap in the market for a new meat product in the region.

Funded by One NorthEast, the project looked into the possibility of making mature lamb a new regional food product and revealed there is a niche opportunity for farmers, recommending a trial of it from scratch.

The research found that the meat – from lambs between one and two years old – is not well known outside the farming industry but is widely regarded by those who do know it as flavoursome, mature and valuable.

It concluded that there is scope for mature lamb to become part of the regional food brand, saying the next step should be to test the entire system of producing mature lamb - from birth to the final product. Look out for an update in the next Food and Farming e-newsletter.

The Seafood Training Centre North East

Anglo Scottish Fisheries Industry Group Training Association (ASFIGTA) has been awarded three years of funding from One NorthEast to deliver skills training to the fisheries and sea food industries. Based in North Shields, the Seafood Training Centre North East will provide a focal point for the enhancement of skills in the region's fishing and sea food industries.



The fishing industry is an important part of the region's economy and cultural heritage as well as contributing towards the tourism experience. Its sustainability relies on the availability of a skilled workforce and a positive industry profile.

A specialist facility like this helps to tackle the recognised skill gaps and shortages that exist, which in turn enables the industry to increase its contribution to the region's economy, adapt to change and provide a focal point for initiatives to improve the industry's profile.

At the Seafood Training Centre North East, courses can be taken in a wide range of subjects from fish filleting, knife skills and health and safety, to chef training. Those interested can also attain a certificate to allow skippers and crew to carry members of the public. The centre was recently classified as one of the two recognised Seafood Training Academies in the UK.

This range of fisheries industry and sea food and processor specialist training will target businesses and individuals across North East England as well as other regions, as a result of additional European funding being secured from the Marine and Fisheries Agency.

Adding value through collaboration

One NorthEast and the English Farming and Food Partnership (EFFP) agree that collaboration and best practice in the supply chain enables English farmers to create and realise significant and sustainable business opportunities.

Huge potential exists for the remodelling of existing chains and the development of new routes to market in the region.

The Agency recognises the vital role that the EFFP plays in developing and delivering initiatives across a wide range of businesses in the supply chain working with farmers, farmer controlled businesses (FCB's) and food companies. Over the next four years EFFP will be working with numerous partners including the Regional Food Group, Business Link North East, the North East Centre for Excellence for Procurement and the North East Red Meat Industry Task Group.

One NorthEast is the primary funder of two collaborative Business Advisor positions based specifically in the region. Recruitment is currently under way with an expected start date of September 2007. In the interim David Hall (EFFP) has been released from the North West to focus his efforts in this region.

The aim of the project is to encourage farmers to work together and with others up and down the supply chain to enhance business competitiveness and continuity of supply to the market, as well as group purchasing efficiency.

An example of where this has worked successfully is in the Scottish borders where a collaborative venture has been set up under the name of Borders Quality Beef (BQB). A group of farmers who used to work independently, have collaborated to specialise in different areas e.g. breeding or finishing, then worked together under the umbrella of BQB to get better deals purchasing goods and services and opening up new market opportunities. Working as a cooperative with the recognised BQB brand has resulted in increased profit margins and a sense of openness and support between members of the group, along with increased confidence.

As part of a regionally focused team, the business advisors will be pro-actively using their skills and experience in bringing together farmers to create and realise commercial benefit. They will be encouraging them to work with processors and retailers to identify opportunities to which collaborative supply chain solutions can be delivered.

Organics

The Soil Association is working with the Agency and our regional partners on the next phase of the organics sector. There seems a strong possibility that this will result in closer links to the Regional Food Group. We should have more information in our next Food and Farming update.

RDPE: Increase in Axis 1 funds

One NorthEast welcomes the news that additional money will be made available for the livestock sector under the Rural Development Programme (RDPE). The North East expects receive an additional £1 million per annum, increasing the budget for RDPE to £6.7m per annum.

The additional money for the red meat supply will channelled towards:

- Bringing about improvements in the competitiveness of the red meat supply chain;
- Assisting the land-based sector to improve animal health and welfare standards;
- Developing nutrient management in the livestock sector.

RDPE is still being developed and is expected to be launched in December 2007.

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www.onenortheast.co.uk/page/page/rural.cfm

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Websites of interest:

www.dott07.com

www.made-in-northumberland.co.uk

www.northumbria-larder.co.uk

www.necc.oc.uk

www.improveltd.co.uk

www.nesffs.com

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