

food & health alliance

Networking Food and Health in Scotland

Newsletter October 2008

Issue 13

Editorial



Welcome to the latest edition of the newsletter.

With the growing urgency of climate change and the need for sustainable development, we felt it was timely to concentrate on food sustainability. Of course, it's impossible to do justice to such a complex topic in one edition but we hope to give an insight into some of the issues as well as showing where the agenda overlaps with food and health.

Firstly we attempt to define what we mean by food sustainability as well as providing a policy summary from both a UK and Scottish perspective. Jan Bebbington, Vice-Chair of the Sustainable Development Commission (Scotland), then offers some thought-provoking ideas on how this can be translated into practice.

We have a follow-up feature on how local food producers from

Argyll and Bute Agricultural Forum found the experience of producing healthy food at T in the Park.

Continuing the theme of locally produced food, we revisit NFU Scotland's food and farming campaign *What's on Your Plate* and assess its impact since the launch a year ago. Are the public buying more Scottish food as a result? And what are the current issues facing our Scottish farmers?

But buying local is only part of the sustainability message. On page 9 we highlight just how much food we waste and describe the *Love Food, Hate Waste* campaign.

Let me know what you think. Feedback is always welcome so please feel free to contact me at fha@health.scot.nhs.uk.

All comments welcome!

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Food sustainability

What do we mean?

It has long been recognised that the amount and type of food we eat is crucial to our health. But more recently we have begun to realise that how that food gets to our plate – that is, food sustainability - is just as important.

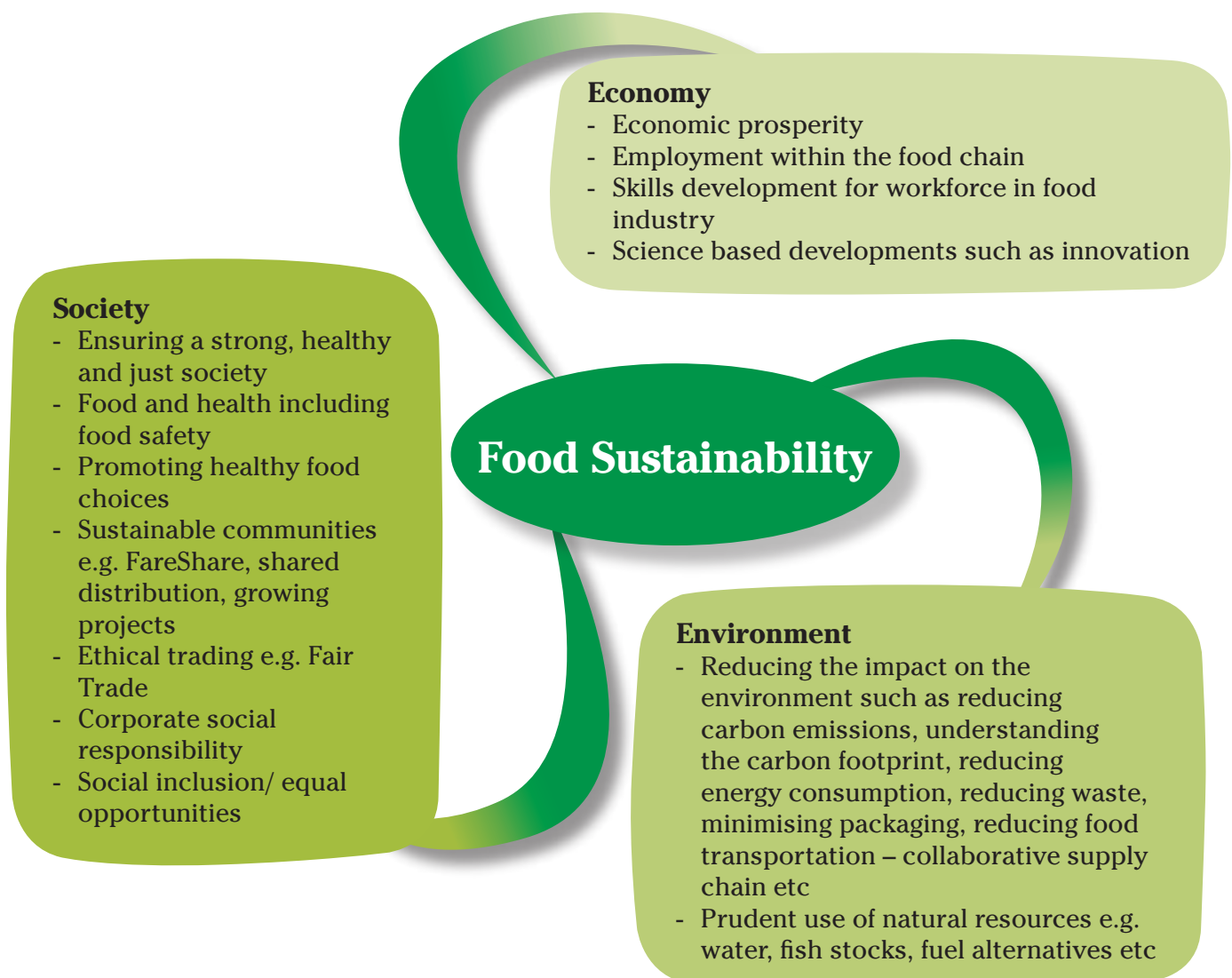
So what does food sustainability consist of? To answer that, we have to take a step back and consider what is meant by sustainable development generally. The Food Standards Agency defines sustainable development as:

‘About enabling people throughout the world to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life, without compromising the quality of life of future generations and the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.’

There are three key areas of sustainable development:

- environment (including the use of natural resources)
- economy
- society

Sustainable practices should effectively balance the needs of all three of these areas. The diagram below translates these into the context of food sustainability, showing the complex inter-connections between the way food is produced and distributed and finally consumed.



Scottish policy context

In the past few years policy-makers have started to spell out what all this means for how food is produced and consumed.

In 2005, with the publication of *Choosing Our Future, Scotland's Sustainable Development Strategy* the Scottish Executive emphasised the importance of safe and healthy food as well as the need to manage sustainably natural resources such as water, land and fish stocks. It identified four priority areas for action: sustainable consumption and production; climate change and energy; natural resource protection and environmental enhancement, and sustainable communities. It also pointed out the 'need to encourage the industry and consumers to increase the take-up of locally-produced food'.

This was followed up in 2006 by the *Review of the Scottish Diet Action Plan*, which recommended there should be 'closer integration between the policy goals of improving Scotland's diet-related ill-health and those of social justice, sustainable development and agriculture'. The panel went on to suggest that the Scottish Diet Action Plan should be developed into a new Sustainable Food and Health Policy.

The incoming Scottish Government of 2007 took this a stage further by attaching new importance to cross-cutting policies and setting high level strategic objectives focused on creating a wealthier and fairer, smarter, healthier, safer and stronger, and greener Scotland.

Among the national outcomes for the greener strategic objective are protecting and enhancing the built and natural environment and reducing the local and global environmental impact of consumption and production.

Sustainability has a strong focus within each of the five key themes for developing Scotland's first national policy for food and drink:

- Supporting the sustainable economic growth of the food and drink industry.
- Supporting consumers and working with the food and drink industry to support healthier and more environmentally sustainable choices through better food education about the impact on health and environment.
- Celebrating and enhancing Scotland's reputation as a land of food and drink.
- Walking the talk – getting government to lead the way.
- Affordability, access and security in relation to food.

The next steps announced in June by Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment Richard Lochhead include supporting local food through initiatives such as:

- A major campaign, led by high-profile chef Martin Wishart, to improve the quality and visibility of Scottish produce served in Scotland's restaurants and pubs.
- An investigation into the idea of 'Scottish' labelling of food and drink to help make it easier for consumers to identify and trust labels.
- A new Scottish Government catering contract which leads by example with greater emphasis on healthier menus and the procurement of fresh and seasonal produce.
- An inquiry into affordable access to food, in light of the global rise in food prices.



UK policy context

Food sustainability is of course vital in Scotland where the food and drink industry is such a critical part of the economy. But it is also increasingly a UK-wide priority.

The question of food sustainability is, for instance, central to the Cabinet Office's *Food Matters: Towards a Strategy for the 21st Century*, published in July and covering the results of a ten-month strategy unit project examining food policy. Some of the key recommendations are:

- The UK should take on a greater leadership role in helping to manage both climate change and global food security.
- Governments should launch a public engagement about a more joined-up approach to UK food policy that pursues fair prices, safer food, healthier diets and better environmental performance. The Department of Health, the Food Standards Agency and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) are working together to develop and engage with the public and food businesses in a new shared vision to guide future food strategy. This work is due to be completed by autumn 2009.

- The UK must continue to focus on fair prices, access to food and food security through competitive markets. Defra will issue a discussion paper.
- The UK must work with other European countries to promote the role of agriculture in mitigating and adapting to climate change. Defra will take this forward.
- A new scheme should be launched to get the public sector in England providing healthier, more environmentally sustainable food. The Department of Health will take forward the development and launch of a new Healthier Food Mark for public food.
- Consumers need help in accessing healthier choices when eating out. They also need information that considers both the health and environmental aspects of food.
- The Food Standards Agency is taking forward work to make it easier for consumers to access advice on a healthy, environmentally sustainable diet.

There is no doubt that achieving genuine food sustainability can appear a daunting task compared to the narrower objective of healthy eating. But food production, distribution and consumption are agendas that naturally overlap, particularly at a local level. Indeed, as the following pages show, making these links could be the key to taking each of these agendas forward.

Further Information

Scottish Executive (2005) *Choosing Our Future, Scotland's Sustainable Development Strategy*
www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/12/1493902/39032

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www.healthscotland.com/uploads/documents/3159-SDAP_Review_Report_Summary.pdf
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www.scotland.gov.uk/food

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www.defra.gov.uk/foodrin/foodstrategy/index.htm

Interview with Jan Bebbington

As Vice-Chair of the Sustainable Development Commission (Scotland) and Professor of Accounting and Sustainable Development at St Andrew's University, Jan Bebbington is well aware of the difficulties of changing people's eating habits and of ensuring food is truly sustainable all the way from farm to plate.



'I understand what I should eat and drink but I don't always do it,' she admits. 'In fact you're probably unlikely to find much food that ticks all the boxes – apart perhaps from my home-grown potatoes!'

But, she insists, food sustainability is the only way forward. It is of course possible to eat healthily without considering the environment – and often it may have superficial attractions because it is cheaper. 'But if producing food in that way is damaging to the ecological system or doesn't produce a fair return for the producers, then at some stage that problem will come to the fore, which means food prices will go up and we'll be in a worse situation.'

Jan originally trained as a chartered accountant – not an obvious stepping stone to her current work. But in fact, she says, this background has been invaluable in helping to monitor sustainable development and establish what really works. 'We look at the social-environmental impact of economic behaviour and accounting techniques can either expose to the public

what's going on or allow you to do what you're doing better.'

So what does all this mean for food? And how does Jan define sustainable food?

In its recent submission to the Government's National Food Policy consultation, the Sustainable Development Commission identified some of the key elements of this approach, including:

- Ensuring safe, healthy and nutritious food for consumers
- Providing a viable livelihood for farmers, processors and retailers
- Respecting the environment and reducing energy consumption
- Supporting rural economies and stressing the importance of local produce
- Meeting the needs of the less well off.

In terms of food production, says Jan, that means, among other things, recognising the importance of land use, soil integrity, biodiversity, use of water and energy, conserving fish stocks, avoiding waste and respecting the landscape. It also means ensuring those

producing the food are properly rewarded.

On the consumption side, it focuses attention on the energy used to produce food as well as transport and waste. It also means trying to improve access to good, safe, nutritious food at the right price.

In practice this usually translates into eating local, seasonal food wherever possible.

'The closer the food is grown to where you are going to consume it and the less transport between producer and consumer, the more likely it is to be fresh and tasty and have a low carbon footprint.'

But that is not always the case. As she points out, food may be produced in the heart of Scotland, then processed and packaged in England before returning to be sold in local shops. 'That would be local food but it may have travelled half way round the country before arriving on your plate.'



Another critical factor is seasonality. ‘Sometimes it may be smarter to grow your beans in Kenya than the UK because of the energy used to grow them here, particularly if they’re out of season.’ It’s also important to be aware of the impact of ‘growing our own’ on the economies of developing countries, many of whom rely on their export trade to places like the UK for economic survival.

So although ‘grow and eat local’ remains a helpful mantra, it should be qualified.

‘Local produce should ensure food travels the shortest distance from farm to plate,’ says Jan. ‘But it also needs to be suitable to be grown locally, processed locally and probably also in season.’

Achieving this will of course require a major transformation in most people’s eating habits and tastes, which in turn places a big onus on effective public education.

One approach that has growing support is ‘choice editing’ – that is, persuading food stores not to stock unnecessarily damaging products and offer a wider range of nutritious, sustainable food to help consumers make healthy choices.

Jan would like to see this linked to a labelling system – similar to but more sophisticated than

the traffic light system – that gives people information not only about the food’s nutritional content but also its provenance, carbon footprint, fair trade rating and more. ‘Once you start labelling food you start the process of shifting to better options,’ she says.

She accepts that in one way this may restrict overall choice, but at the same time it expands healthy choices. ‘And wouldn’t it be great if the only food you could pick was low carbon food that was good for your health?’

The fact that the era of cheap food is probably over may be no bad thing for sustainable development, she feels. ‘It may lead us to being more inventive, which in the long term will help people to live well and eat well.’ For example, it is estimated we currently discard around a third of the food we buy – dearer food could help to concentrate minds and so reduce this waste.

So how can people in Scotland combine healthy eating with sustainable development?

Jan is enthusiastic about the growing number of community food initiatives which aim to improve access to healthy, affordable and locally produced food, particularly for disadvantaged groups.

‘We don’t need multinationals for food – it can be done at quite a local level,’ she says. ‘We tend to think the big, corporate for-profit model is the answer to everything. But I think not-for-

profit but economically viable and small can produce better outcomes in this area while at the same time keeping money, skills and jobs in the local community.’

Nevertheless the top priority has to be reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This is especially important in Scotland’s food and drink industry, currently responsible for 20% of the country’s carbon footprint. ‘If we trigger dangerous climate change then lots of the other questions become academic.’

But despite the enormity of the task ahead she remains determinedly optimistic. ‘We have only got into this mess because we haven’t thought systematically about what we were doing,’ she points out.

‘But we’re very clever monkeys. We’re very inventive and we’re very compassionate and that gives me hope for the future.’

‘But also, what is the choice? You can do this with some modicum of cheerfulness and humanity and humility or you can get grumpy or give up. **This is a very serious agenda but I think serious fun is better than serious grumpiness!**’

Further Information

www.sd-commission.org.uk/scotland.php

Communicating the message

How to cut waste and eat better

It's a startling fact that in Scotland a third of the food we buy is thrown directly in the bin. That is the equivalent of throwing away one bag of shopping in every three.

Love Food Hate Waste is a nationwide initiative aimed at combating waste and encouraging the Scottish public to be more waste aware in its attitude to food. One of the keys to this is buying seasonally and locally.

The campaign, which was launched last November, focuses on four key areas to help reduce food waste – planning and preparation, storing food, recipe ideas and portioning. It has the backing of leading Scottish chefs including Nick Nairn, Tom Kitchin, Lady Claire Macdonald and Martin Wishart.

'Scotland has a fantastic larder of seasonal and local food all year round,' said Michelin star chef Martin Wishart. 'Food tastes so much better when it's in season. At this time of year berries in particular are bursting with flavour, really good for you and so versatile. They're easy to freeze for another day too.'



Dr Nicki Souter, Campaigns Manager for Waste Aware Scotland, commented: 'We're trying to increase awareness of what's in season throughout the year. It's a staggering thought that the average Scottish household throws away £410 per year on food that could have been eaten, simply because we forget to use it or cook too much. Our website offers simple and practical advice on how to make the most of the food that you buy and avoid food waste. Most people have a great tip or recipe idea to reduce food waste and we would love them to share their ideas on our website.'

A massive 587,000 tonnes of food is thrown away every year in Scotland. Most of this food could have been eaten with a

little more planning and better storage. Less than one fifth of food waste is truly unavoidable.

The *Love Food Hate Waste* campaign has been developed by Waste Aware Scotland, in partnership with the Waste and Resources Action Programme. The campaign website, www.wasteawarelovefood.org.uk, offers a collection of seasonal tips, recipes and advice from Scotland's best known chefs and food writers.

Further Information

Please contact campaigns officer Ruth Campbell at info@wasteawarelovefood.org.uk

Why thousands are signing the food pledge



One year on, the high profile What's On Your Plate? campaign is beginning to make its mark, says Anna Davies, NFU Scotland's Communications and Campaigns Manager

Over 18,000 people have signed an online pledge to support Scottish food and Scottish farming since the NFU Scotland *What's On Your Plate?* campaign was launched in June 2007.

Over the past year NFU Scotland staff and local farmers have been attending a range of events, including agricultural shows, school fetes and promotional activities, to try to get their message across.

In essence the aim of the campaign is a simple one: to outline all the benefits that farming delivers, from supporting local communities and the Scottish countryside to combating food miles and climate change, maintaining high animal welfare standards and providing fresh, traceable food which can form a key part of a healthy diet.

Scottish farmers are responsible for much of the superb food and drink that arrive on our tables every day. But very few of us ever step back to think about where it has come from.

There are encouraging signs that the campaign's message is now beginning to get through. In addition to public support and considerable media coverage, there has been a very positive response in political circles with the campaign's title becoming common rhetoric in the Scottish Parliament among MSPs, many of whom have themselves signed the pledge.



The next stage of the campaign is perhaps the toughest – to raise awareness among the public and to try to measure its impact on their eating and buying habits. With this in mind we plan to concentrate on working with journalists and features writers in an effort to increase our coverage in national newspapers and television.

Information from the large retailers on sales of Scottish produce is a closely guarded secret but indications are that sales at farmers' markets are on the rise. The big increase in farm shops also indicates that the public is demanding local produce. We need this trend to continue among all retailers.

As well as focusing efforts on the campaign, NFU Scotland also spends a great deal of time lobbying on behalf of its farming members to ensure they get a fair return from the market place for what they produce.

We are particularly concerned about supermarkets' very public moves to cut prices on a number of staple foods. This is supposedly aimed at helping customers combat the credit crunch, but we believe it could have a damaging effect on farmgate prices as well as future supply of quality Scottish food and drink.

It comes at a time when food producers nationwide are facing rocketing input costs against a background of challenging and, in many cases, unsustainable farmgate prices. Where there have been farmgate price rises, these have not kept pace with rises in production costs.

This is most notable in the red meat and dairy sectors, where spiralling fuel, fertiliser and feed bills have eroded almost non-existent margins and where supply is already at risk.

After years during which food price inflation has been well below the retail price index,

the position appears to have reversed with significant increases in staple food items affecting every household in the country.

The rise in food prices in the UK is obviously part of a global phenomenon, driven by reduced supply and increased costs. However, in the absence of improved market returns for Scottish farmers, the danger is that supplies will tighten even further and that aggressive pricing strategies, while alleviating some price pressures on consumers in the short-term, may exacerbate the problems over the longer-term.

We can't have it both ways. Nobody wants the public to be disadvantaged but we can't have cheap food and the associated price pressure on farmers and still keep the food flowing onto our plates. Farming must be sustainable in the long-term if it's going to continue feeding the nation.

If continued aggressive price cuts by retailers spill over into price cuts at farm level, some farmers will end production of some products altogether (indeed this has already started to happen), demand will exceed supply and we will end up with a shortage.

The *What's On Your Plate?* website (www.whatsonyourplate.co.uk) outlines all the reasons for supporting Scotland's farming industry. In addition, it contains a calendar of seasonal produce, as well as a useful map listing a number of local food outlets such as restaurants, farm shops and mail order businesses.

Further Information

Those wishing to support the campaign or find out more can contact Anna Davies at editor@nfus.org.uk.

Schools to pilot food activity pack

Schools and community groups across Scotland are piloting an activity pack that explores where our food comes from and how it gets to our plates.

The *Food Miles Plus Activity Resource Pack* has been produced by Forth Valley Food Links (FVFL), Forth Environment Link and NHS Forth Valley, and encourages exploration and discussion of the many issues involved in getting food to our plates. These include climate change, food production, locally-produced food, packaging, transport, processing, waste, seasonality and health.

The pack is an awareness-raising tool about food and its impact on the environment, our health, communities and local economy. It is designed to encourage discussion to help

people think about making informed choices and buying more healthy and sustainable food and provides information about locally-produced food and local food initiatives.

The pack contains eight 'mix and match' activities including a quiz, building and comparing the food chains of different fruit and vegetables using a colourful set of cards or transport toys, tasting and cooking sessions based on suggested seasonal and healthy recipes and visits to local food producers, growers, processors and retailers. The activities range from 10 minutes to one day to suit the time that groups have available, their abilities and interests.



There are also a set of fact sheets, which have teachers and leaders' notes, and a 'Did You Know?' and 'Talking Points' sections.

FVFL is piloting the resource with 100 community groups and schools across Scotland, which will take place between September and December 2008. Groups will be asked to complete a short evaluation form to help the development of the final version of the pack. If successful it is then hoped to roll out the scheme – which ties in well with the current National Food Policy discussion – across the country.

For more information, contact Diane Alderdice at Forth Valley Food Links on 01786 449215 or email diane@fvfl.org.uk

**Producing
sustainable
healthy food**

Healthy T area is music to fans' ears

Queues are, of course, an occupational hazard of rock festivals, whether they are for the loos, the beer or even the rock bands themselves. But this year's T in the Park Festival, held at Balado near Kinross in July, witnessed a more surprising one – for the healthy food arena.

Over the course of the weekend many of the 80,000 young fans who had flocked to hear the Kaiser Chiefs, the Verve and Amy Winehouse were also to be seen waiting patiently for the range of healthy food and drink on offer in the Healthy T area, developed in partnership with the Scottish Government, Big Day Out Ltd and Tennents Lager.

In fact the arena, which also included music, massage and confidential sexual health advice and screening, was one of the event's big hits. Many said they chose to eat exclusively at Healthy T over the course of the weekend and some said it was their favourite part of



the whole festival. A number of the traders have already asked if they can be located in the Healthy T area next year.

One of the highest profile producers was Argyll and Bute Agricultural Forum (ABAF), which sold a wide range of food during the weekend from organic burgers and salmon rolls to salads and puddings. Development manager Fergus Younger admits they were uncertain about what to expect, particularly given the Scottish Government stipulation that all foods on offer must meet certain healthy eating standards.

That meant that, for instance, that all white bread had to be replaced by healthier wholemeal, that everything had to be reasonably priced and that the portions of sticky toffee pudding, produced by Bumble Puddings, were smaller than usual and served with low fat custard.

'Bumble' Marshall (real name Alexandra but 'no one calls me that'), who produces the puddings as well as a range of other foods, was initially a bit sceptical about this requirement. She is unapologetic about singing the praises of puddings which are in her view 'food for the soul and mind as much as the body'.

But she admits the smaller portions proved a big hit with the fans. 'Nobody said they hadn't had enough and everybody seemed to enjoy it with custard... the response was really great. In fact we came close to selling out.'

In her view lecturing people to stop eating the things they enjoy will never work. 'But you can promote the fact you are allowed to have treats so long as you don't indulge to a huge extent. So long as it's part of a balanced diet I don't think it's a bad thing.'

In the light of the Healthy T experience she is now thinking seriously about reducing the portions of her puddings in future and charging less. 'I think that's probably the way to go and I would say it helps to make people feel a bit better about themselves.'

'The fact is you're selling something that's a treat, not an everyday experience – a bit like festivals themselves!'

The government's requirement that only wholemeal bread would be allowed for sandwiches, rolls and burgers also took some of the producers aback. There were concerns not only about taste but also costs – white bread lasts longer so is likely to lead to less waste.

But Virginia Sumsion, marketing manager with Loch Fyne Oysters, admits it worked so well in practice she may consider using wholemeal bread more widely in future. Loch Fyne produced a range of seafood for the festival including salmon fillet rolls, smoked mussels, soups and salmon pasta and demand was so great it had practically sold out by the end of the weekend.

Part of the secret, she believes, was that the Healthy T area was both welcoming and completely clear about what it was selling. 'I think it went much better than any of us expected. I was a bit nervous beforehand because T in the Park is directed at such a young group and we were concerned they might not be interested in what we offer.'

'But we found there was a market at the festival for good food. And it's amazing how much people eat at festivals! People were coming back two or three times for our food.'

As an organic grower and chef, Robin Gray, who works on the Isle of Arran, didn't have to alter any of his produce to meet Scottish Government specifications. He too was delighted with the general response to his food, which included organic burgers as well as braised beef and vegetarian dishes.

Producing food for a festival can be an expensive and often risky business. Robin admits he lost out a few times at previous festivals where stalls almost outnumbered fans, but Healthy T was a big success and ensured he has made a small profit overall – money which has now been reinvested in more equipment.

But it involved very hard work for him and his team of four – 'and then there's the music going on till 3 in the morning so you don't get much sleep either!' The one advantage was that at the end of an exhausting weekend he was able to get a much-needed massage from the therapists who were working in the same area. 'That was one of the highlights of the festival as far as I was concerned!'



Forthcoming Event

Spreading the green message

The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, which represents and supports community operated gardens and farms, is holding a networking conference entitled *Growing Greener Communities* in Battleby, near Perth, on 2 October.

Bringing together Federation members, policy-makers and representatives of organisations related to community gardening and farming in Scotland, this popular annual event (organised in association with Trellis and Allotments Regeneration Initiative) is now in its fourth year and will be held at the Scottish Natural Heritage Offices in Battleby.

Federation members are increasingly aware of the impact their work has on health and diet. At the same time more health organisations are realising that gardening is something that can add value to their services.

The day, which starts at 10.30, will include a plenary and workshop sessions as well as a community gardeners' question time and even an opportunity in the afternoon for swapping seeds!

Further Information

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