

Argyll & Bute Agricultural Forum

PRESS RELEASE

Argyll Food Producers do Connect Again

The 2007 farmers' market-style food marquee was one of the many hits of the inaugural Connect Music festival, at Inveraray Castle. The Marquee offered a range of ready to eat local produce, from Barbreck roast beef and Lochfyne Oyster's salmon rolls and kippers, Inverloch cheeses and Kingscross Herbs vegetarian dishes thus significantly broadening the range of foods commonly served at festivals.

Geoff Ellis, director of festival organiser DF concerts, said, "Over the last couple of years people are more and more concerned about what they are eating, where it comes from, and how it is produced. We support this, and working with Argyll Food Producers allows us to offer a range of locally sourced high quality produce, some of which has not been offered to people attending a music festival before".

Geoff Ellis said, "At 2008 Hydro Connect we are creating something really special and the feedback we received last year from music fans and from food producers told us that it had been a really big success".

The feedback was so good that the Argyll Food Producers are now booked in to return to the Hydro Connect festival. The producers will also sell their produce for the first time at T in the Park, which annually pulls in 80,000 fans.

The Argyll Food Producers have formed a group, with the support of the Argyll and Bute Agricultural Forum. The Forum is a rural partnership of farmers and other interested agencies which aims to help sustainable agriculture and crofting in Argyll and the Islands. Fergus Younger, who started two years ago as development manager for the forum, sees the Hydro Connect music festival as an alternative route for spreading the message to an audience that might otherwise miss out.

'Our main message is about promoting our region and our local food producers,' he says. 'But we're not just focusing on food because there's a recognition that it has a cross-sectoral benefit for tourism and health in our region.'

"Last year we had over 700 mini questionnaires completed at Connect to win a local food hamper. These surveys indicated very strongly that people valued quality local food and knowing who had produced it. Our customers were not just foodie types but lots of young folk were giving us very positive feedback" Fergus went on to add, "Duncan Bryceland from Greenock won the Hamper and was over the moon with it".

This initiative will also promote the National Farmers Union's What's on Your Plate Campaign. Anna Davis Campaign Manager, "The NFUS are pleased to support the Argyll food producers in raising awareness of the quality local produce that is seasonally available in Scotland".

It has been very worthwhile, but Fergus admits setting up a marquee offering fresh, high



quality food at a music festival is 'not for the faint-hearted'. The lead in often has to start six months in advance and working at the event itself can often involve 18-hour days.

It also meant a steep learning curve for many of the farmers and local producers who had never had to prepare such large quantities in such a short space of time. 'To begin with it was a lot of hard work to persuade producers that it was worthwhile, we have been lucky in receiving support from HIE and the Council to undertake producer development training".

The producers will be attending the festivals under their own steam but are grateful for the financial support of the Argyll and Bute Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, The Noble Trust and Leader in producing branding and advertising materials.

Ends

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Notes for Editors

1. The Agricultural Forum is a rural partnership that works towards a vision of sustainable and prosperous farming and crofting enterprises benefiting communities across the Argyll Area. Website www.argyllagriculturalforum.com
2. Hydro Connect 2008 www.connectmusicfestival.com
3. SAC website www.sac.ac.uk/
4. NFUS website www.nfus.org.uk