



DEVELOPING FOOD TOURISM: DELIVERING SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL REGIONS AND COMMUNITIES

Interim Report

I. The Project

Purpose of the project

To examine how food-related tourism can deliver social, cultural and environmental sustainable development in rural regions and communities, then develop tangible and practical solutions to achieve this. The objectives of the project are as follows:

- To facilitate communication between public and private sector food and tourism consumers/providers;
- To build understandings of visitor behaviour in order to enhance the enjoyment and experience of food tourism;
- To make practical recommendations on how to make local food more widely accessible and affordable;
- To develop a powerful on-line web portal to promote, share and disseminate good practice;
- To help rural communities build sustainable food tourism networks, thereby sustaining livelihoods, skills and cultures.

In order to accomplish these goals, we began by the collection of data as a means to assess the individual needs and interests of stakeholders and tourists in developing a sustainable food tourism initiative. Section II explains the results of the stakeholder surveys and Section III lists the tourist survey responses.

II. Stakeholder interviews

Purpose of the interviews

In total, 16 interviews were conducted via telephone between 24 March and 15 April, 2010, with food and/or tourism organizations across the United Kingdom. Table 1 shows a breakdown of those who participated by organizational type.

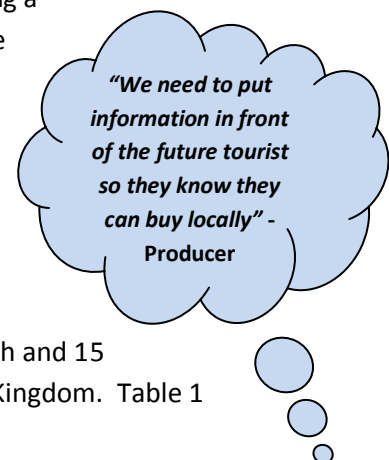


Table 1: Interview Participants	
Organizational Type	Location
1. Consultant	British Isles
2. Consultant	Scotland
3. Consultant	Scotland
4. Food Festival	England
5. Food Festival	England
6. Local Government	Wales
7. Local Government	Wales
8. Local Government	England
9. Local Government	Wales
10. Non-profit Organization	Scotland
11. Non-profit Organization	England
12. Producer	Wales
13. Producer	Scotland
14. Producer	Scotland
15. Tour Operator	Scotland
16. Tour Operator/Farmer's Market	England

Each interview lasted approximately 15 minutes and consisted of 7 open-ended interview questions. Table 2 lists the questions asked. At the conclusion of the discussion, interviewees were invited to discuss additional concerns or issues as they related to the project. The objectives of the interviews were as follows:

- To engage and secure the support of regional bodies responsible for the delivery of food tourism;
- To recruit significant numbers of active food tourism providers and identify long-term partners to assist in the delivery and sustainability of this project;
- To identify barriers to food tourism provision, development and consumer engagement;
- To solicit advice of the long-term management and sustainability of the food tourism website.



Table 2: Open-ended Phone Interview Questions

1. Tell me a bit about your organization and your involvement with food tourism?
2. What are the most pressing challenges you face in organizing or promoting food tourism in your region?
3. How do you think the UKfoodtourism.com project can assist you in overcoming your challenges?
4. What are your key expectations from the UKfoodtourism.com website? What are your key concerns?
5. What website-specific attributes do you feel are vital to the success of the UKfoodtourism.com website?
6. How can this project ensure long-term sustainability both in management and in content? How would you like to see this project managed in the long term?
7. Is there any questions that have not be asked that you feel should be addressed during these interviews?

Interview Results

The interviewees were divided into 6 groups based on their organizational type: consultants, food festivals, local government, non-profit organizations, producers, and tour operators. There are numerous overlaps between the needs and visions of the organizations interviewed.

Common insights about food tourism include:

- Local food production is considered a lifestyle that contains cultural value and preserves local heritage;
- Food tourism can cumulatively expand the market for producers and food service providers;
- Food tourists are difficult to market to;
- There is a need to explain the benefits of local providence to overcome producer and food service complacency.

Common challenges in food tourism faced by the interviewees include:

- Encouraging wider use and better promotion of locally produced food;
- Identifying and accessing tourism markets;
- Gaining knowledge about tourism markets as tourism data is fragmented and not well maintained;
- Building a destination brand based on local food production or food service establishments;
- Collaboration and creating a better network between regions and groups (food producers and hospitality businesses);
- Accessing best-practice knowledge from around the country.

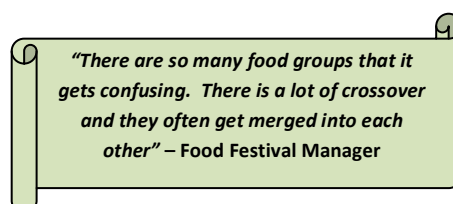
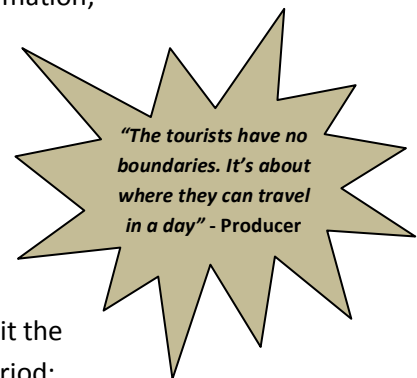


Connecting local producers with the tourism sector is a common difficulty. It can be attributed to a number of variables such as:

- Many local producers are micro-businesses that do not want to grow and/or farmers are reluctant to diversify;
- Producers often do not see the value-added in entering the tourism sector;
- Producers lack knowledge and/or available knowledge is confusing about tourists and the tourism industry;
- It is difficult to reach producers as they are widely spread geographically;
- There are differing needs between small and large producers;
- There is a lack of guarantee in quantity and quality in local supply;
- The lack of economies of scale result in higher local food prices;
- There is a lack of information to hospitality providers on locally produced options;
- Food service establishments are extremely stretched and use price as a point of difference;
- Tourism sites in the UK are not well packaged or promoted;
- It is difficult to find the unique selling point of local food.

A lack of resources, especially time and financial support, were frustrations held by all food and tourism organizations interviewed. In particular:

- Consultants need information on food service standards, packaging, product development, and other corporate and industry-specific development information;
- Food festivals and farmers' markets struggle to make their events self-sustainable;
- Food festivals and farmers' markets need a national promotion medium;
- Food festivals and farmers' markets need access to vendor information, local food sourcing, advertisers, and funding schemes;
- Local governments face human resource constraints that limit the number of tasks that can be accomplished in a given time period;
- Local governments wish to utilize food tourism as an economic development tool that simultaneously encourages job creation, urban regeneration, sustains the food industry, and grows the economy;
- Non-profit organizations find that regional development is fragmented between local government initiatives, regional food organizations, and tourism bodies. In some areas, these groups work together in partnerships, in other areas they are highly competitive.
- Producers feel that both tourists and the hospitality industry need to know where they can buy locally and the advantages of buying locally;
- Producers need information on distribution channels to access the tourism sector;
- Tour operators have difficulty connecting local agriculture with tourist activities, such as visiting farms and educating the tourists on traditional production techniques;
- Tour operators struggle with international marketing because tourists are spread out and difficult to reach.



Most interviewees were excited about the prospect of a national website, although some feel that there are many websites offering the same information at the regional level. Table 3 lists the website attributes that were most important to the interviewees.

Table 3: List of Suggested Website Attributes
Case studies (for producers, experience from peers, best practices)
List of pubs and restaurants that carry local food
Press releases for projects, markets and festivals across the country
Forum for communication (blog, question and answer section, local food sourcing)
Recipes/Information on local food/Seasonality
Links to funding schemes
Industry specifics (product development, distribution, hygiene, food presentation)
Educating the tourist (what is food tourism, variability in UK food, benefits of buying local)

Furthermore, producers and organizations want control of the website content and want website users to be able to contact them directly. Most interviewees suggested using links to other website rather than to carry extensive content directly.

The long-term sustainability of the food tourism website project created much discussion and debate. In general, it was felt that the project should be industry led as government organizations suffer budget shortages that often change the focus of projects over the long run. Others felt that tourism organizations would be best motivated to sustain the projects as their mission is to increase visitor numbers to their areas. Regional food groups were also encouraged to be actively involved, although it is unclear if regional food groups have exposure in all parts of the UK. Most interviewees recognized the need to include a fee-based membership option as a means to employ personnel to update content and to keep the website current. Some recommended a board to oversee the long-term management of the project.



III. Food Tourism Surveys

In Total, 267 tourist surveys were collected at three regional food festivals around the UK during the autumn of 2009: Abergavenny Food Festival, the Stratford Festival, and the East Midlands Food Festival.

Purpose of the Surveys

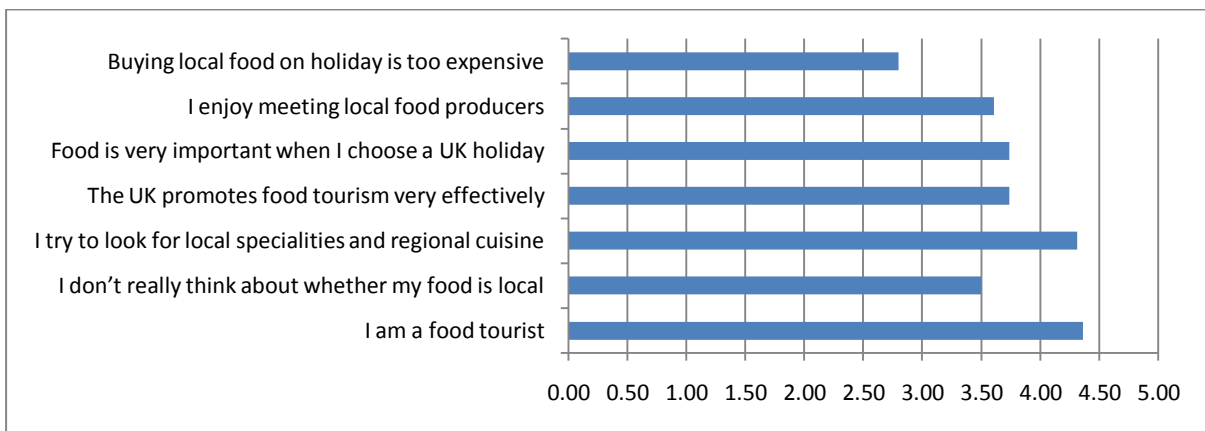
The purpose of the survey data is to:

- Build understanding of the food tourist and potential for engaging more people in food tourism;
- Identify consumer needs and gather information on how best to develop food tourism;
- Identify how to make local food more widely accessible and affordable to tourists;

- Facilitate communication between public and private sector food and tourism consumers/providers.

Survey Results

Participants were asked to rate their agreement with the following statements (5 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree). In general, tourists recognize themselves as food tourists and feel that local food is important, both when shopping at home and when travelling. However, there does not appear to be enough information available to the tourists about how to access the local food chains while on holiday.



Tourist Behaviour – Food tourists appear to enjoy eating out, attending food festivals, and farmers' markets. They showed little interest in cooking holidays and food trails. They express the need for better information about local food and where to go for food-based activities in the UK. Food tourists prefer interactive websites when learning about food activities and events.

Figure 1: What food-related activity do you engage in on a regular basis?

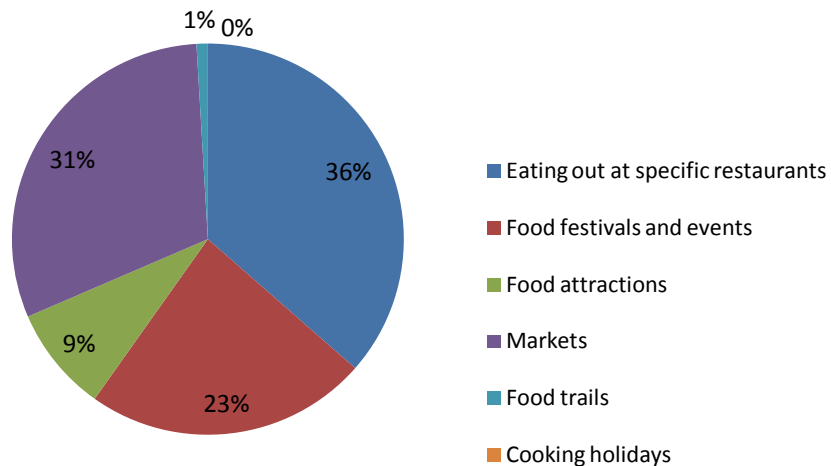


Figure 2: What makes you buy local food when you are on holiday?

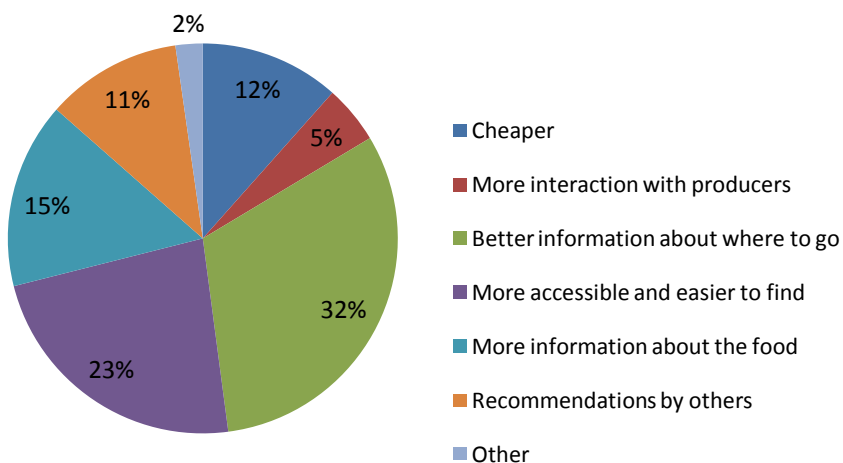


Figure 3: How would you prefer to find food-related information?

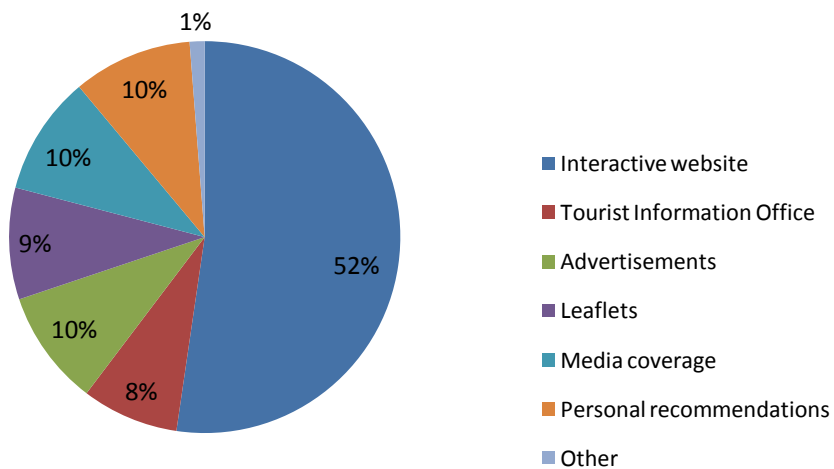


Figure 4: What food-related activities would you like to learn more about?

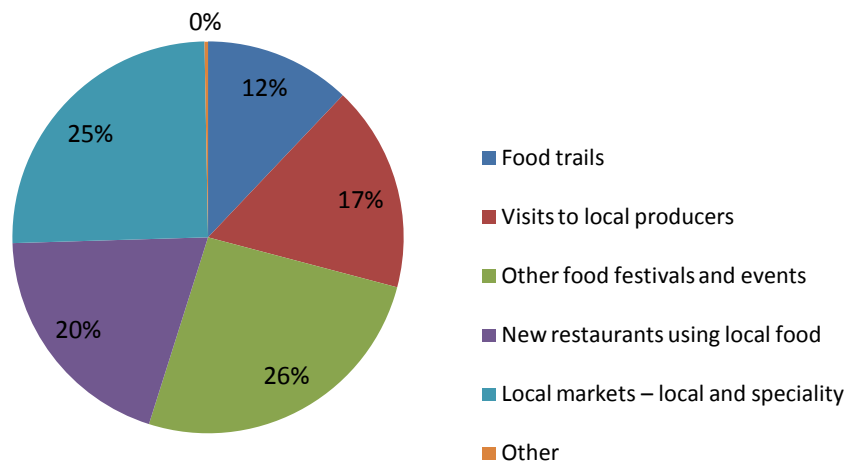
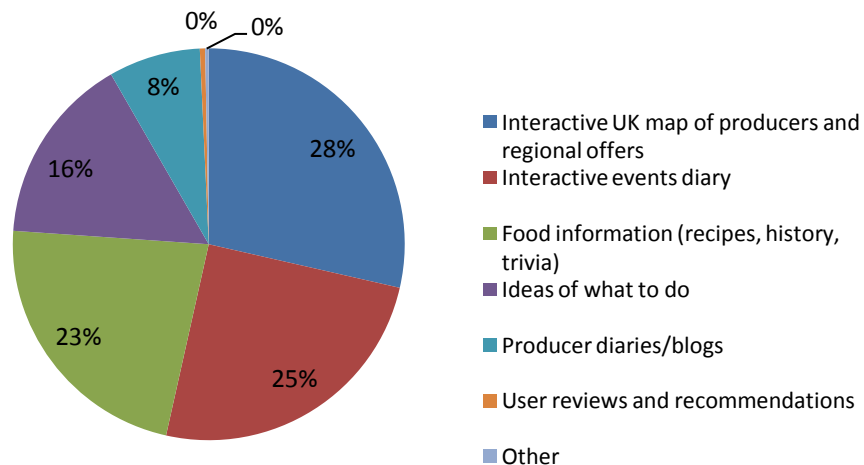


Figure 5: What things would you find helpful on a food tourism website?



Food Festivals – Food festivals and farmers’ markets were the most popular food activities for the participants. Most food tourists were repeat visitors to the Abergavenny Food Festival, the Stratford Festival, and the East Midlands Food Festival and attended because of their strong interest in food. Again, better publicity is needed to encourage the attendance of additional festivals across the country.

“Many food events are simply shopping events with a high ticket price. Abergavenny, Real Food, Foodies all stand out as offering more” – Food Festival Visitor

“Please do not encourage the gimmicky and the trivial. Encourage real local food, not olives, or Italian stuff, but British traditional things, with local ingredients.” – Food Festival Visitor

Figure 6: Why did you decide to visit this food festival?

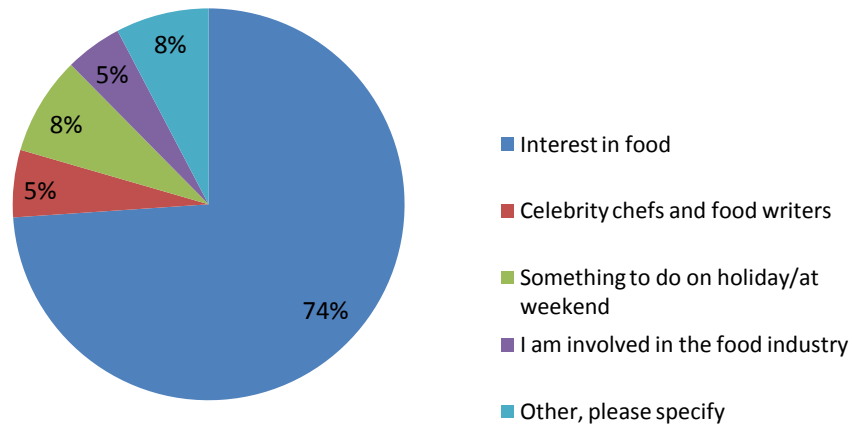


Figure 7: How did you hear about this food festival?

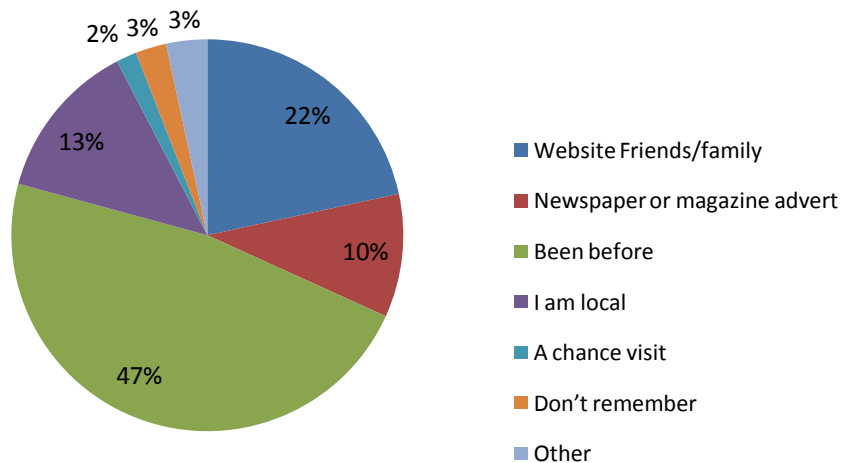
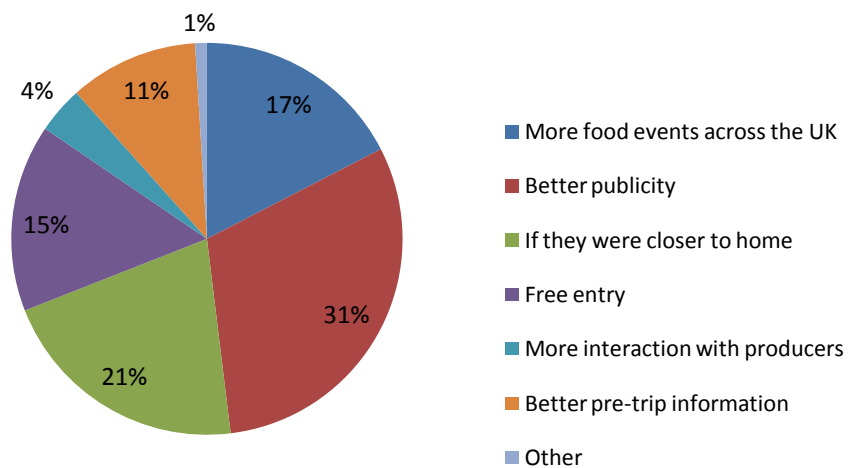


Figure 8: What would make you attend more food festivals?



IV. Next Steps

The next step in the process is to begin the physical construction of the food tourism website. We have decided to develop each section by region initially to gauge the amount of material and diversity in food offering across the UK. This is not necessarily how the website will be operationally, but helps us structure the development and content in a manageable way. We are beginning with three regions initially, but don't fret, we will be including everyone throughout the next few months. The first three sites are **Wales, the East of England, and Northumberland**. If you are a food or tourism organization or a producer in these three areas and you have not spoken to someone on the project, you are encouraged to give us a call or drop us an email. The final website is scheduled to be on-line sometime in September.

Again, thank you to all who participated in the stakeholder surveys

You are encouraged to call or email any additional suggestions or comments to:

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