



Local Produce: Growing for a better future



Spring 2005

Sustainability issues associated with where our food comes from cut across a number of objectives in the West Sussex Sustainability Strategy. These include promoting healthy lifestyles, reducing pollution from food transportation, and creating local economic prosperity while encouraging and protecting wildlife.

These subjects were discussed at a joint meeting of the West Sussex Sustainability Forum (WSSF) and the West Sussex Rural Forum (WSRF).

Forum Steering Group

Why are current food production systems unsustainable?

Taken from a talk by Dr M Caraher, City University, London

Recent UK newspaper articles highlight an increasing problem with obesity. The problem appears to be due to changes in what and how we eat – our food culture. Three main causes can be identified as the ready availability of food, large portion sizes, and cheaper “unhealthy” food.

In the UK, fruit and vegetable production is in decline. Where there is a demand this is met by increasing importation. Changes to the local food supply chain mean that stores are now fewer but larger, and they are harder to get to.

Food itself travels further before it is consumed. In the UK up to six out of ten items on a plate are not produced in the UK. Two out of three apples are now imported.



To reverse these trends public bodies should support local procurement in contracts. Everyone can support local food shops and networks, and a county wide food policy could be developed to include new co-operative models and reform of the wholesale food sector.

T Hoskins and Lobstein, T (1998). Food Facts no3

By the end of the 1990's 42% of all rural parishes in the UK had no shop.

Source: Environment Select Comm. 1999 2nd report

The following are examples of initiatives across the Southeast Region that are starting to address these issues.



Source: Sussex Downs Conservation Board

The landscape of the South Downs has been in decline for the last 50yrs and now has only 3% of its chalk grassland remaining. To protect this landscape the Downs need to be grazed, and the wider landscape restored by linking existing habitat fragments.

To achieve this efforts could be focussed on promoting the sort of economic activity that will put care of the environment back into the economy. We should explore new ways of marketing the countryside to re-link the producer with the consumer, people with their environment, and think about what makes the South Downs an attractive place.

The Sussex Downs Conservation Board (SDCB) is working with local business and agricultural consultants to set up a local supply chain. This will link farmer co-operatives, abattoirs, food processors and butchers, and set up a distribution network promoting a “South Downs” food brand. Initially for lamb production, beef, beer and charcoal could soon be included in the scheme. This means that in the future by “eating and drinking the view” we can all help to restore the landscape heritage of West Sussex.

WEST SUSSEX SUSTAINABILITY FORUM



East Sussex Food and Health Partnership (ESFHP)

Taken from a talk by Sarah Davies, Programme Manager, ESFHP.

The ESFHP aims to “promote a sustainable local food system that supports good nutrition, human and animal health, which reconnects, and works for the benefit of consumers, producers and the environment.” The Partnership supports a large number of projects, including finding new outlets for local food, running cookery classes for young and old, and promoting local food in schools.

Sussex Food Finder



The Sussex Food Finder is a guide to locally produced food in East and West Sussex. It contains lists of markets, shops and restaurants that specialise in local produce. www.sussexfoodfinder.co.uk

How can we in West Sussex encourage a more sustainable approach to food supply?

- Raise awareness of what it means to eat a healthy diet, especially with young children
- Eat (and buy) more local food ourselves
- Encourage the sale of local produce through existing systems
- Set up new networks between producers and suppliers
- Support local food festivals
- Improve traceability and quality assurance schemes for local produce

Taken from a workshop on this topic at the WSSF, WSRF meeting



In 1961 there were 116,000 independent grocers in the UK.
By 1997 there were just 20,900.

Source: Environment Select Comm. 1999 2nd report

Further information

- Action in Rural Sussex: www.srcc.org.uk
- Countryside Agency & “Eat the View” campaign: www.countryside.gov.uk
- East Sussex Food and Health Partnership (ESFHP): www.foodandhealth.org.uk
- Linking Environment and Farming (LEAF): www.leafuk.org
- National 5 a day Partnership (national campaign to increase fruit and vegetable consumption): www.5aday.com
- National Farmers’ Retail & Markets Association: www.farma.org.uk
- Sussex Downs Conservation Board: www.vic.org.uk
- Sussex Enterprise and A Taste of Sussex: www.sussexenterprise.co.uk



West Sussex Rural Forum

The Rural Forum (established in 1997) draws on representatives of organisations concerned with rural areas. The Forum is co-ordinated by West Sussex County Council and Action in Rural Sussex. The work of the Forum in recent years has been to develop a Strategy and action plan, identifying areas of work which need to be done to improve the delivery of rural services.

If you would like to contact the West Sussex Sustainability Forum please write to the WSSF Secretariat at:
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