

# **FOOD, LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

## **EVALUATION**



**An evaluation on the seminar run by  
the Scottish Community Diet Project and  
the Scottish National Rural Partnership  
at the Queen's Hotel, Lockerbie  
30 January 1998**



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Scottish Consumer Council  
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# INTRODUCTION

## **Deirdre Hutton, Chairman of the Scottish Consumer Council and Rural Forum**

I am very pleased to be able to introduce this report of the conference Food, Local Communities and Rural Development held in Lockerbie at the end of January. It was a special conference for a number of reasons: there was the enormous enthusiasm of all those who attended from the length and breadth of Scotland; there were the interesting and stimulating projects that those attending the conference were able to visit; and there were excellent presentations from a range of speakers in the afternoon, some of whom gave insights into the rewards and tribulations of running food projects and some of whom talked more generally about the wider context.

What was particularly interesting was that it was the first time that the Scottish Community Diet Project and the National Rural Partnership had brought together people working in community diet projects with people working in community economic development. Although diet projects might at first sight seem to be only about food, in fact when they are successful they can have a significant spin-off in benefiting the broader economic development of their community.

This conference was about making links between groups of people who previously thought that they were doing quite different things but who found, through the conference, that there were useful and important relationships to be made which could add value more broadly in the communities in which they were working.

It was exploratory, interesting, stimulating and occasionally chaotic but it did illustrate clearly the potential benefits of a variety of partnerships and I hope that this report will give you some flavour of the day.



# LOOK

The day begun with 30 of the delegates visiting local community food initiatives.

One bus took a group the long drive to Kelloholm, just north of Sanquhar, where they met volunteers and staff at the **Upper Nithsdale Family Centre** run by the NCH (Action for Children Scotland) and heard of their work with children and parents. They then accompanied them to their Community Cafe based in the local leisure centre.

**Upper Nithsdale Family Project, Kirkfield, Greystone Avenue, Kelloholm, Kirkconnel, Dumfriesshire, DG4 6RB, Tel: (01659) 66135**

A second group visited the **Food Train** in Dumfries, a registered charity which began trading in July 1995. Originally envisaged as a food co-op, it was felt more appropriate to *provide a surrogate shopping service to persons of a pensionable age, or to younger persons resident in the operating area who, by virtue of disability, infirmity or other disadvantage may be entitled to the use of the service.*<sup>1</sup>

**The Food Train Ltd, Enterprise Workshops, Shirley Road, Dumfries, DG2 0ED Tel: (01387) 720 340**

The third bus headed to the **Rendezvous** in Dumfries, a National Schizophrenic Fellowship (Scotland) project which includes a cafe and meeting rooms. The project aims to *provide support, friendship and opportunity for people affected by serious mental illness, and to help spread a greater awareness of the real issues involved.*<sup>2</sup> The cafe is also used by many others in the area who appreciate its low cost healthy menu.

**The Rendezvous, 20 Brewery Street, Dumfries, DG1 2RP Tel: (01387) 259 272**

The delegates came back from the trips with a lot of praise for the efforts of all three initiatives and a number of points to raise in the later sessions.

*The Rendezvous*



nsf  
National Schizophrenic Fellowship  
Scotland

*The Food Train Ltd*



**Upper Nithsdale  
Family Project**



nch  
action  
for  
children

**SCOTLAND**

<sup>1</sup> from Mission Statement of The Food Train Ltd

<sup>2</sup> from Rendezvous leaflet



# LISTEN

The presentations were designed to highlight local attempts to address concerns around food in rural communities through the development of partnerships or alliances. Both had recognised the many facets of food and had responded by developing relationships, sometimes with unfamiliar partners.

*"If we were seen to be against meat and cheese, the main job of the health project would have been setting up a counselling service for local farmers!"*

## **BEST BY MILES - FOOD FROM THE ISLES**

**was presented by Carol Muir from the Islay & Jura Health Promotion Project and Angus Kerr, a beef farmer, NFU member and director of the recently re-opened Islay Creamery.**

Carol started by giving some background to Argyll & Clyde Health board's thinking in setting up a health promotion project on Islay & Jura before explaining the linking and networking that was to result in 'Best By Miles-Food From Our Isles'. The long and still ongoing recruitment of partners was noted as having a number of practical manifestations but none more so than last summer's Islay show when the Health Promotion Project ran a tent jointly with the Islay & Jura branch of the National Farmers Union, the Islay & Jura Environmental Schools Project and a local restaurateur.

Carol noted that there were few aspects of island life that did not overlap with the 'food' agenda and she was currently supporting the setting up of a youth cafe and disabled access market garden.

The collaboration had attracted lots of interest from national bodies including Scotland Forward, the Scottish National Rural Partnership, the Scottish Community Diet Project and even the 'hit squad' from the Beechgrove Garden but Carol emphasised its essentially 'bottom up' approach.

Angus gave a brief introduction to Islay & Jura, highlighting its large number of distilleries, plentiful sheep and even larger number of geese.

He went on to give a very stirring defence of 'local produce'. He highlighted the importance of beef, lamb and cheese to the health of the local economy and the health of the local inhabitants. He therefore saw every reason for local farmers to be working alongside the local



*"The cheese was the most sought after local Christmas present, even surpassing the Spice Girls and the Teletubbies!"*



Health Promotion Project and local schools.

He particularly highlighted the co-operative effort and community support required to re-open the islands' only creamery and re-establish Islay cheese.

He concluded by describing the work on Islay & Jura as a 'unique partnership' which had gathered strength and resilience from within the islands and which deserved support and encouragement from outside.



**Promotion Department of Highland Health Board and Ruth Anderson from Rural Forum.**

Cathy began by giving some background to the creation of a Highland Food Group before going on to highlight key issues in initiating and sustaining such a collaboration.

She noted the partnership went beyond the more common strategy of bringing together the Health Board and Local Authority to involve the Scottish Tourist Board, Crofters Union, Scottish Agricultural College, Scottish Grocers Federation and Highlands & Islands Enterprise.

Cathy stressed the importance of time being given to encouraging a feeling of 'ownership' of the group by all those involved. She also highlighted the development of a shared vision of where the group is going despite their varied interests and motivations.

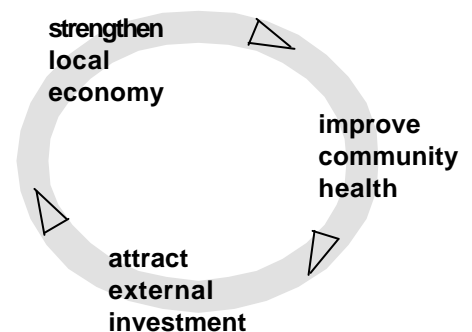
Cathy concluded by explaining that the next step was the development of a programme that will be of practical use as well as strengthening the relationship.

Ruth, who chairs the Highland Food Group, followed on by highlighting the essential tensions that exist in attempting to work in partnership and pursue shared objectives

She stressed the importance of understanding different agendas as a means of achieving a productive balance. Ruth concluded by highlighting the importance of developing effective strategies that recognise and take advantage of the relationship between social and economic investment in local communities.



ECONOMIC v ENVIRONMENTAL v HEALTH	
SMALL SCALE	v LARGE SCALE
RESEARCH	v ACTION
STRATEGIC	v REACTIVE
SUSTAINABILITY	v SHORT TERM



# TALK

The workshops were asked to look back at the morning visits and the afternoon presentations and discuss their significance in terms of *sustainability* and *transferability*. In other words, what does the future hold for this kind of work and are there lessons to be learned that can be applied elsewhere?

The concluding panel discussion and plenary was kicked off by four short reflections on the day by Prof Annie Anderson from the University of Dundee, Ruth Anderson from Rural Forum, Norma Neil from the Sonas project on the Uists and Ian Scott from the Robert Owen Foundation based in Paisley.

A common starting point for much of the discussion was a recognition the problems generated by attempts to compartmentalise 'food'. Responsibility for food lay with many parties, some with a greater sense of their responsibilities than others. Food is as difficult to approach from a purely economic, community or sustainable development approach as it is from a purely nutritional, dietetic or health promotion perspective. The significance to everyone from crofters and town planners to genetic scientists and dentists, not forgetting everyone as consumers, highlights the problems of trying to deal with food on a sectoral basis. Hope for the future seemed to lie with a greater appreciation being shown by these parties of **a broader perspective on food** and its significance to their own and other's sectoral interests.

A second common theme was the issue of **access and availability** of food in rural communities. A key problem was not concerning lack of food but more around issues of choice and opportunity.

[REDACTED]

agreed as being a tool for building or contributing to sustainability rather than creating vulnerable dependency. Examining the potential of the **Land Fill Tax** was a popular option.

It was noted that many of the community food initiatives (CFI's) that had been visited as well as those present



were based on **simple but effective** ideas and benefited from local needs being assessed, understood and met locally. It was raised by some that there was pressure from prospective funders to be *innovative* when there was not always justification for it.

The crucial **contribution of volunteers** to many of these local initiatives was also noted along with the incredible energy and enthusiasm displayed. Key individuals were highlighted as fundamental to the running of many CFI's with obvious repercussions should their involvement cease. The otherwise welcome 'loss' of volunteers to the labour market was noted by some as a threat to sustaining an initiative. The varying motivations of volunteers was also discussed and particularly the role of **economic necessity as a catalyst for action** (eg the last village shop or local food producer closing down).

The interrelationship of **strengthening communities**, attracting investment and improving health was floated by one facilitator and taken up by others. Investment in communities from **Health Boards** and **Local Authorities** was noted as uneven. However, even where major assistance had been received there was a feeling of insecurity in the current financial climate. Many felt that a greater contribution from those involved in **economic development** would be appropriate and welcomed the increasing interest shown by those involved in **local agenda 21** work. Many initiatives were recognised as having been predominantly supported in the past from one sector or another but **multi-sectoral support** was appreciated as both the best guarantor of sustainability and for setting appropriate agendas.

The benefits of **local growing** of food was raised in some workshops as well as the problems of marketing such produce. The dearth of **local markets** was noted and their encouragement seen as not only of mutual benefit to producers and consumers but also improved urban/rural engagement.

**School-based growing schemes** were highlighted as having a number of immediate benefits (eg relating growing to cooking, and eating) as well as being an investment in the future.

The potential benefits of applying **new technology** to





tackling market failure in remote rural communities was raised. A centralised distribution system allied to localised ordering through computer terminals based in key centres such as Post Offices was suggested and felt by many to be worthy of further examination.

While recognising that food is grown, traded and processed often on a global scale, it was still felt that there was a place for **local alliances**. Locally led initiatives tapping local experience and understanding were seen as a crucial element in sustaining any development. It was further felt that such collaboration often took place despite the absence of, or unconnected to, similar activity at higher levels.

A key lesson learned by many from what they had seen and heard was the importance of having a **direction** to their activity.

highlighted as important in developing appropriate strategies, accessing funds and generating relationships (eg producers and markets)

The role and significance of **local produce** (and even wild produce!) was recognised and with it the need for a re-education of consumers, producers and caterers on **seasonality**.

The use of **local and national events** (eg agricultural shows, enterprise symposiums, health fairs) to raise awareness about produce and its economic, health and environmental implications was also seen as a practical way forward.

A key point from the event was the importance attached by those working at community level to **being listened to** and the benefits to policy makers of **listening**. However it was recognised that this would involve a learning process and **change of culture** for many institutions.



# TAKEAWAY

Alongside very interesting displays from Dumfries & Galloway and Islay a number of useful papers and reports were made available by delegates.

**FOOD NETWORK NEWS** is the first edition of a one-page A4 newsletter produced by the recently set up Food Initiatives Network in Dumfries & Galloway. Copies available from the local Health Promotion Department (see participants list for address).

**END OF THE ROAD? FOOD ACCESS AND AVAILABILITY IN UPPER LOCH TORRIDON AND THURSO** is a four-page A4 summary report on research commissioned by Highland Health Board from Dr Sarah Skerrat and Dr Linda McKie. Copies available from the local Health Promotion Department (see participants list for details).

**FOOD AVAILABILITY AND FOOD CHOICE IN REMOTE AND RURAL AREAS** is a 34-page report based on research conducted in the Western Isles and published in 1995 by HEBS. Copies still available from HEBS (see participants list for details).

**AYRSHIRE AND ARRAN CHC NHS TRUST FRUIT & VEG PRICE SURVEY** is a one-page A4 summary of findings from a survey of price and availability in 10 rural and 3 urban settings. Available from Fiona Smith, Community Dietician, Ayrshire Central Hospital, Irvine, Ayrshire, KA12 8SS.

**ISLAY & JURA HEALTH PROMOTION NEEDS ASSESSMENT** is a comprehensive piece of research (approx 80 pages including appendices) and is available from the project (see participants list for details).

**BEST BY MILES - FOOD FROM OUR ISLES** is a collection of pieces (A4 7 pages) from the various partners in this Islay coalition. Copies available from Islay & Jura Health Promotion Project (see participants list for details).

**WILD ISLAY** is a collection (A5 8page) of recipes for wild Islay food compiled by a local woman. Available from I&JHPP. (see participants list for details)

## **EDINBURGH LOCAL MARKET**

is a one-page A4 examination of the potential benefits of setting up a market run by producers and consumers. Available from the Edinburgh Community Food Initiative (see participants list for details).

## **THE HIDDEN STRUGGLE-FOOD POVERTY IN WEST LOTHIAN**

is a report produced by West Lothian Poverty Action Forum with help from the Health Unit at West Lothian Council. Details of availability from WLPA, 36 King St, Bathgate or from the Health Unit at West Lothian Council, West Lothian House, Livingston.

**FARE CHOICE** is the quarterly newsletter of the Scottish Community Diet Project. You can get on the mailing list by contacting SCDP (see back page for details).

**STARTERS - A REVIEW OF THE FIRST YEAR OF THE SCOTTISH COMMUNITY DIET PROJECT** is a 17 page report covering the work of SCDP and is available from the project (see back page for details).



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# THANK YOU

Thanks are due to the volunteers and staff at **The Food Train** and **Rendezvous** in Dumfries and the **Upper Nithsdale Family Project** in Kelloholm for being such welcoming and informative hosts.

Thanks are also due to Deirdre Hutton for chairing a busy afternoon session.

Carol Muir/Angus Kerr and Cathy Steer/Ruth Anderson gave very honest and enlightening presentations as were the reflections in the final session from Prof Annie Anderson, Ruth Anderson, Norma Neil and Ian Scott.

Donna, Kevin, Jacquie and Bill did their best to ensure that all constructive comments were taken note of at the workshops.

Many of the local arrangements would not have been handled so efficiently without the assistance of Elaine Kirk from the Health Promotion Department of Dumfries & Galloway Community Health NHS Trust.

The staff at the Queen's Hotel, Lockerbie should also be thanked for being so accommodating.

Thanks are also due to our colleagues at the Scottish National Rural Partnership.

This report has been Desk Top Published thanks to Jacquie MacIntyre from the Scottish Community Diet Project.

Finally it is most important to note that the efforts of delegates from all around the country to attend and contribute to this event was appreciated by the organisers and undoubtedly added to its success.

**Bill Gray**  
**NATIONAL PROJECT OFFICER**





As seminars on rural food issues and community development were in the work programme of the Scottish Community Diet Project based in the Scottish Consumer Council and the Scottish National Rural Partnership at the Scottish Office, it was agreed to jointly run **Food, Local Communities and Rural Development** in the Queen's Hotel, Lockerbie on Friday 30 January.





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