

Promoting Local Produce

Innovative ways to conserve and enhance the cherished landscapes and habitats of the Severn Estuary and levels

This guide is intended to highlight the connection between landscape and produce. It encourages everyone who has an interest in maintaining the diversity of landscape and habitats to identify activities that will achieve effective management through adding value to our economy and communities.



Why Local Produce?

This guide draws on expertise, input and ideas from a wide range of organisations and businesses along the Atlantic Arc including, Portugal, Spain, Ireland and France. Local best practice has also been identified in South Gloucestershire, Gloucestershire and Somerset, and local pilot projects have been carried out. Base line data has also been collected from a range of English and Welsh bank authorities, including the landscape character assessments of South Gloucestershire, Gloucestershire and Monmouthshire.



In 2000 the Prime Minister charged the Countryside Agency with a new role to “assist consumers to understand the connections between the food they buy and the countryside they value, and to work with others to develop projects to achieve this aim and to improve the market for regional produce.” The ‘Eat the View’ initiative developed as part of the Countryside Agency’s response to this challenge. Through its own actions and in partnership with others, the Agency is working to raise public awareness and secure a more favourable market to enable and encourage farmers, other land managers and consumers to diversify, adopt more sustainable practices and consumption.

This guide builds on this initiative by embracing all types of produce and also by promoting the other values of our landscape such as biodiversity.

Background

Europe’s coastal zones are an important focus for economic activity as well as supporting some of the most valuable and endangered natural/cultural resources of the European Community. Finding ways to foster the economic potential of rural areas in a way that does not jeopardise the environment is a serious challenge that is being faced in many parts of Europe. Local population centres can have a role to play in supporting the economic base of their rural hinterlands, though current mainstream food retailing does not generally take account of this.

The promotion of local produce and products can make an important contribution to regional economies as well as supporting local businesses, promoting sustainable consumption (for example by

reducing ‘food miles’) and making consumers more aware of the source of such products.

There are many international, European, national and local initiatives that target the conservation of natural heritage, mostly linked to specific legal requirements and some have led to the establishment of protected areas. Here, the usual approach is to identify and protect such geographic areas according to specific nature conservation, heritage or landscape criteria. A more unusual approach is to consider how such areas might contribute to sustainable development. By enhancing the local economic base, and by linking produce and the environment, this guide offers a practical approach to realising the economic potential of valued habitats and landscapes. Additionally by marketing that link, consumers can become aware of the benefits to their own area of consuming local produce.

The guide provides a range of international case studies of best practice. However, it is important to remember that there are cultural differences in food provision. Several European countries have retained their markets for local produce, whereas in the UK we have become largely dominated by the large supermarkets for so long that we often have to rediscover ways of marketing our local goods. Significant successes have been achieved in recent times through initiatives such as farmers markets, but they are a minority market and much more could be done.

Although the focus in the coastal areas often tends to be on produce of the sea, the land areas adjacent to the sea have a distinctive identity because of their geographic relationship to the sea. This guide primarily focuses on the land areas of the coastal zone rather than on the produce of the sea.

The Severn Estuary: landscapes & habitats

The Severn Estuary is one of the largest estuaries in Britain, having the second highest tidal range in the world. The Estuary is internationally recognised for nature conservation, having the status of Special Protection Area (SPA) under the EC Conservation of Wild Birds Directive and is a Ramsar site (a wetland of international importance). A large area of the Estuary, including the subtidal zone, is a possible Special Area of Conservation (SAC) under the European Habitats Directive. The area is of national and local conservation status with a variety of national and local conservation designations. There are particular challenges associated with managing these habitats due to the size of the area and complexities of governance – covering two regions and many local authority administrative areas.

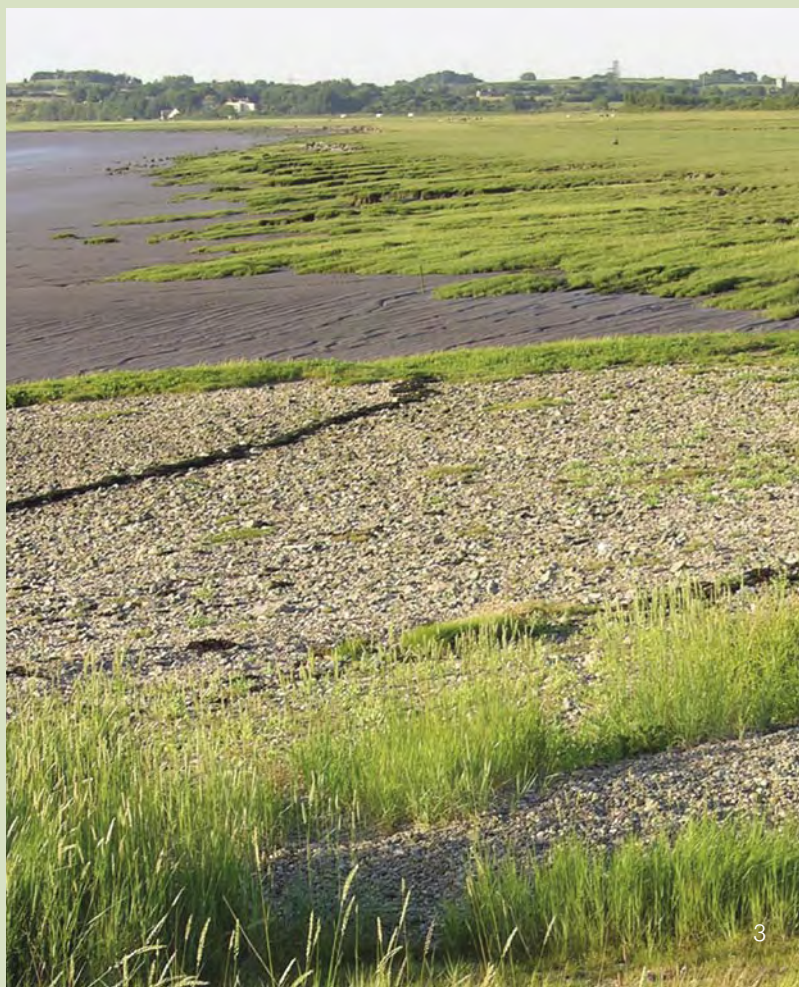
The estuary itself has large associated tracts of low lying rural and urbanised land, locally known as 'the levels', and the English and Welsh banks share many of these characteristics. The levels are backed by higher ground and hillsides that overlook the flood plain. The levels are a largely flat open agricultural landscape. A defining physical element of this area is the complex pattern of drainage ditches and tidal rhines that divide the fields which link and flow into the estuary. Small deciduous woodlands and copses with some examples of remnant pollarded willow and coppiced trees are present. Scattered amongst the mixed pasture and arable fields, and usually adjacent to farms, are a number of small orchards in a varied state of repair.

The drained riverine farmland and grazed salt marsh is a low lying, windswept and generally treeless flat landscape of productive improved cattle pastures. There is a diversity of species-rich habitats of scrub, saltmarsh and sand dunes dominated by long shingle beaches, that are home to large bird and invertebrate populations in some parts. These flat

coastal levels are often punctuated by large modern farmsteads, sometimes accompanied by remnant orchards.

Historically orchards covered large areas of the Severn Vale. In recent times these have been grubbed out and replaced with grazing land or crops. Despite significant losses small orchards survive and neat rows of fruit trees can often be seen in close proximity to farms. Many fields appear to have been left fallow. In these meadows, buttercups and other wild flowers have been allowed to grow unchecked, resulting in an attractive contrast to the more well maintained arable fields and improved pastures.

The Severn ridge to the east and south, and the hills to the north are steeply undulating diverse areas rising up from the surrounding lower landform. They are dominated and united by their sloping landform, which varies from gently rolling to undulating, to steep scarp slopes. There is a diverse mix of land cover dominated by woodland and hedgerows that divide the intricate mix of pasture and arable land.



Lessons from Europe

Best practice case studies

A diversity of Atlantic regions and diversity of produce was selected for the case studies in order to be able to gain a broad understanding of approaches that are relevant to this coastal area.

Case Study: Quality Branded Local Produce: Montado Habitat, Alentejo, Portugal

The Alentejo is a large region covering almost a third of the landmass of Portugal, being bounded in the north by the River Tagus (Tejo), in the south by the hills of the Algarve, to the east by the border with Spain and to the west is the Atlantic Ocean.

Historically having poor road infrastructure and being sparsely populated and predominantly rural, the landscape is of exceptional quality. Its scenic beauty, cultural complexity and diverse wildlife make it an important area regionally as well as internationally. Alentejo through its anthropological elements remains a region of strong cultural identity.

The Montado is a unique agri-silvi-pastoral system developed from the management of the oak forests and scrub that used to cover the area. The forests were cleared of the scrub vegetation and undergrowth to allow livestock to graze, crops to be planted and timber and fuel to be extracted.

The Montado habitat is greatly valued for its landscape diversity and biodiversity. This woodland pasture harbours some of Europe's rarest wild animals such as wolf, pardal lynx, genets, mongoose and wild cat and rare birds such as the Spanish Imperial



Eagle and Black Vulture. As well as being botanically very rich, there is a wealth of Fungi, Ferns, mosses and lichens.

Today few crops are grown in the Montado areas due to the poor nature of the soils. Although some soil improvement is carried out, on the whole very little is done. This has meant that the Montado is florally species rich but has low yields from low density stocking levels, and consequently low farm revenues.

The reduction in the use of corks for the wine industry, has further impacted revenues. In many areas this has led to the abandonment of farms and management of the Montado and has resulted in the growth of scrub in the area. This results in severe fire risks, which are increasingly destroying large areas of this important habitat. The scrub regeneration also out-competes the trees and the end result is a loss of habitat.

As the producers cannot compete on price due to economic advantages of intensive farming, they have decided to win on quality. The quality of meat produced from the extensive system is much higher than intensively reared livestock. As a result, meat quality marques have been established to market the quality products. Two of the many examples are the Carne de Porco Alentejano and the Vitela Tradicional Do Montado. There are also moves to increase revenue from tourists by marketing the natural and cultural heritage, for example through bird watching.



Case Study: Galician Food Festivals

Galicia's position in the north west of Spain on the Atlantic coast ensures the wild countryside and mountains sets it aside from the rest of Spain. Galicians are passionate about their food and are proud not only to share their cultural traditions but also to celebrate the rich diversity.

The main appeal of Galician gastronomy is this variety and to such an extent that it is hard to know which is the most typical dish of the region. If there is one key thing that characterises all of the local dishes, it is the passionate way of slowly cooking quality local food with varied abundance. The same ingredients can be slowly cooked in many ways. The often simple methods of preparation produce the most complex of flavours.

A tradition of festivals and a mixing of religious and gastronomic celebrations, have evolved including processions along traditional routes lined with stores selling local produce. In recent times, the importance of eating has become ever more important, and festivals solely devoted to food have developed all over the region. The gastronomic celebrations aimed at celebrating and raising awareness of the importance of the typical products include wine, octopus, ham, Galician stew, shellfish, lamprey, eel, Galician pies, peppers, trout, elver, beans etc. These festivals are spread throughout the year across the entire region forming an important part of the local economy and culture.



The Organic Centre at Rossinver

Case Study: Centre of excellence: The Organic Centre, Rossinver, Ireland.

The Organic Centre was established in 1995 as a non profit making company limited by guarantee, to provide training, information and demonstrations of organic gardening, growing and farming. *"The aim is that the Centre will prove of real value for anyone involved in organic production or marketing. Availability of technical information, answers to queries, provision of courses and the demonstration of different techniques and methods should be of very practical assistance particularly to small-scale producers in the West. Quite apart from this, the Centre will also be an important source of public education, promoting a much wider understanding of the environmental and health implications of organic food."* (The Organic Centre).

The Centre includes:

- Demonstration gardens and growing tunnels illustrating organic methods of food production.
- A wide range of training courses geared at all levels, from the interested amateur gardener to the professional grower.
- Information and advice for commercial growers and farmers.
- A Wetland sewage disposal system. Display gardens for visitors - including a children's garden, a taste garden, a heritage garden, an unusual vegetables and salads garden, and a display of composting techniques.
- The resident Small Farms Development Worker can advise and assist farmers in all matters of conversion to organic methods.
- The Centre now employs 12 staff and hosts an award winning training scheme for those interested in a career in organic horticulture.
- The Centre is aiming to broaden its customer base and promote sustainable practices across a diversity of communities.

The latest phase of development therefore saw the opening of a purpose built training centre, housing an organic café, a shop, teaching rooms, an information centre and offices. Constructed in accordance with ecological principles, the centre also serves as a demonstration of environmentally sound building design.

Action in South Gloucestershire

Local Food Partnership

The South Gloucestershire Local Food Partnership was set up and has representation from; local producers, caterers, the National Farmers Union, Campaign to Protect Rural England, Women's Institute Markets, the local authority and the health authority. The group developed a local food strategy that aims to increase the availability and consumption of local food.

As the group operates in a smaller geographical area, it can concentrate on local initiatives which don't transcend the geopolitical or cultural zones which were perceived to hamper a wider geographical group.

The group is able to identify local needs and issues and has developed a strategy to deal with a variety of issues. Local projects have been identified and actions taken to raise awareness of and market local food. Two pilot projects agreed by the group were: to organise a series of open days for local producers to raise awareness and advertise the availability of local produce; and to develop an interactive web site to promote local food producers.

Contact is being made with groups in Gloucestershire to seek to improve promotion across boundaries, and through the Severn Estuary Partnership. It is hoped that through the vehicle of a web site, joint working may be initiated.

South Gloucestershire Council sources local and organic produce for school meals

In 2001, South Gloucestershire Council made a commitment to source as much locally produced food as possible in order to provide fresh, healthy food for all the pupils in its schools.

The Council's local purchasing policy and the partnerships it has developed with local farmers and suppliers, has potential to bring huge benefits to the local economy as well as directly addressing the environmental issues that catering brings: the use of energy resources, waste management, recycling and packaging.

The catering manager has been able to network with local farmers, producers and the local suppliers to facilitate the Council's requirement to obtain products as fresh as possible at the point of delivery. The range of locally-sourced products includes fresh and/or organic

vegetables, eggs, fresh meat, ice-cream of which have appropriate traceable audit trails as required in respect of Food Safety.

Additionally, the Council aims to help to reinstate local orchards by using local apples which are rejected by supermarkets as imperfect but which are ideally suited for the fruit cones sold in the tuck shops.

The Catering Division is also sourcing local organic products from "The Better Food Company" in Bristol, including organic bread. This retailer has been established to receive small (or large) amounts of produce from a large number of suppliers, in readiness for distribution. It is notable that among other local products, it now sources local farm eggs and home-made ice-cream for no more than was charged by previous large suppliers.

Farmers Markets

In common with other areas, farmers markets are held regularly in South Gloucestershire, for example at Chipping Sodbury on the last Thursday and second Saturday and at Thornbury on the first and third Thursday of each month. Fresh produce from local farms and producers is available with the added benefit of being able to speak to the producers of the food. By programming the markets to include a weekend, the potential market amongst the working population is expanded.

Local food fortnight

One of the objectives of the local food group is to promote the sustainable consumption of local produce. The group is keen to market local produce as a way of maintaining a healthy local farming economy, reduce food miles and promote healthy eating. It was decided therefore to hold a series of open days to promote local food producers, for example:

- A farmers market was started at Downend attracting 300-400 people, with some stalls selling out after 2 hours. A local produce market in Filton, an area where good quality fresh food is scarce, also attracted hundreds of people to a variety of stalls.
- Greys Organics produces and sells organic beef and eggs at Shepperdine and at Riddles cider, a farm business that makes cider from its orchard at Kington near Thornbury. These producers demonstrate the importance of marketing the produce in safeguarding the distinctive coastal and estuarine environment, and are just two instances of the success of the local food group's initiative.

Greys organics although organic since 1982 has only been an individual farm since May 2004. This means the farm has no historic entitlement to subsidies and therefore

needs to survive on production alone.

Greys Organics has already demonstrated its ability to enhance valued habitats.

Since becoming organic the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group survey of the farm has shown an increase in the number of birds on the farm - an indication of the enhancement of the habitats as a whole.

Riddles Cider is a typical example of a small scale cider producer selling cider from the farm gate. Orchards as well as being a valuable part of the landscape are extremely important for biodiversity. Many have become redundant and therefore surplus to requirement and grubbed up with the tragic loss of the associated wildlife. By stimulating interest and demand for the produce at events like this, revenue is created for the farmer and a valuable economic income from the orchard ensures its survival.

Year 8 of the Food Fortnight saw a significant increase in visitor numbers, demonstrating the success of this event, and the potential benefits to local producers.



Winterbourne Barn

The Friends of Winterbourne Barn are in negotiation to lease this mediaeval tithe barn in order to turn it into a Local Produce Centre of Excellence. There is already a local hurdle maker in residence, and a series of events has taken place including an Orchard Harvest Festival.

There are lessons to be learnt from the European case studies and the link to the Organic centre at Rossinver needs to be explored further.



In order to encourage the effective and sustainable management of important habitats and landscapes we need to increase their value to those who manage them. One way of increasing their value is to increase their productivity and economic return. In order to help with this process we need to raise awareness, stimulate demand and maximise the marketing potential of local produce, and the World Wide Web is an increasingly important tool in achieving this. Traditionally, leaflets have been produced; however these quickly become dated as the market changes.

As part of the marketing campaign a web site has been designed to provide live information to the public about the location of the producers, the local produce available and the retail outlets where all local food can be purchased from. This is a pilot project at the local level which is transferable to the whole of the estuary area and beyond. The web site developed incorporates a variety of information, a selection of which is shown below.

An interactive map allows consumers to view their local area on a map, and identify local outlets and producers by their geographic location. By clicking on the symbol on the map, information about produce, location, opening times etc can be discovered. Consumers are able to locate suppliers closest to their home, thereby promoting reduction in food miles. In addition, if links are made to appropriate web sites catering to visitors, local businesses may be able to benefit from additional passing trade.

In addition to individual businesses, the web site provides the opportunity to promote wider initiatives such as local farmers markets to nearby communities and urban populations. The web site can also be used to promote special events such as the Local Food Fortnight and Apple Day recently held in the South Gloucestershire area. The web site will be maintained within the Council's web site and can be updated as new venues and events are planned. This results in improved efficiency by reducing the need for printed material and reduces costs to organisers.

Partnership working between local land owners and public organisations is a key mechanism that can assist in encouraging the sustainable management of valued habitats and landscapes. The web site is

therefore also incorporating advice on the availability of advice and grants that may be available to anyone managing important habitats. This is an important service that helps promote sustainable management.



Recommendations

Studies of coastal landscapes along the Atlantic Arc have shown how important it is to conserve and enhance these areas, both for quality of life, economic well being and environmental conservation. Transnational working has highlighted the following ideas and initiatives that can be implemented locally across the Severn Estuary, both on the English and Welsh sides.

There are various mechanisms by which these can be delivered, but implementation depends on adequate funding for them at a local/national level or as part of a wider European funding programme. There is much more that can be done.



Benefits of Local Produce

Purchasing local produce strengthens the local economy by keeping money spent locally, offers more diverse employment, helps farmers add value and increase revenue. There are also environmental benefits by reducing “food miles” and associated pollution, and reduction in packaging and waste of valuable resources.

Organic farming can have a considerable impact on the biodiversity of the area by improving and managing valuable habitats for wildlife.

Fruit and vegetables bought direct from the producer tend to be fresher and have been shown to contain higher levels of vitamins. The increased awareness of local food and interest in purchasing it will have health benefits and also contribute to a sense of local distinctiveness and pride amongst local communities in their local environments.

Local Food Forum

The most important step is to establish a local food Forum in order to coordinate the issues around local food. All local stakeholders can then feed into the process to develop strategies and initiatives that relate to their local area.

This study has highlighted the importance of a number of mechanisms that can make a significant contribution to promoting local produce to local communities:

- Food festivals
- Food quality marques/branding
- Centres of excellence
- Cooperatives
- Farmers markets

Food festivals and events

Local distinctiveness is the key to safeguarding cultural traditions, local food production and local economies. The connection between production, cultural traditions and landscape have been interlinked for centuries. With the introduction of modern farming techniques and shifting patterns of retailing, there is an ever increasing danger that uniformity of mass production will wipe away centuries of tradition.

It is important therefore to encourage the promotion of local food production and use innovative ways to market local produce. Elements of celebration, education and awareness raising, as well as basic information about availability and location, should be included.

The promotion and support of festivals and events that celebrate the unique and diverse range of local produce can be an effective way of engaging urban populations with the producers and produce of their local area.

Food quality marques/branding

The mechanisms can promote the quality, health and environmental benefits of local food production.

Further work should be undertaken at a local level to encourage and fund investigation and research into establishing local branding of produce, including:

Investigating the potential for developing environmental criteria for the brand. This would encourage and reward high standards of habitat management by farmers and producers. The important landscapes and habitats would be conserved and maintained and the benefits could be used as a marketing tool.

There is potential for marketing a Severn Estuary brand although initial consultation showed some



resistance for an estuary wide initiative from the farming community. With the ever increasing need for increasing sales of local food the potential for food branding should be further investigated, encouraged and promoted.

Centres of excellence

It is recommended that a feasibility study is undertaken to investigate the potential demand for a centre of excellence/ education for local food production and marketing.

The role of the food centre would be to support new and existing rural businesses by providing training in all aspects of environmentally friendly production techniques and business management issues. Provide a centre for marketing, education and awareness raising. This could also contribute to local tourism, by engaging with local communities on their doorstep.

It will be important to fund the planning, organisation and implementation of centres where demand justifies provision, or where rural areas are in economic decline and are in need of regeneration.

Cooperatives

Further work is required in the Severn area to research the barriers to local food production and distribution, and where identified, support the establishment of local cooperatives to achieve economies of scale to improve the competitiveness of local markets. Where appropriate it is beneficial to link with the local food centres to provide advice and information services to local producers.

Farmers' markets

There is potential to further expand these markets and broaden access to local populations. The public can gain confidence in the origins of the foods, ask questions and get closer to the sources of local foods. The producers get valuable feed-back from customers.

Local procurement policies

It is recommended that further work is undertaken to investigate the potential for increasing the amount of local food purchased by public bodies.

There is particular potential to expand the extent to which local authorities and other public institutions work in partnership with local cooperatives to provide local food for their canteens and for schools. Also to further develop publicity to promote understanding by school children and the wider community of the links between consumption and the attractive rural landscapes around the towns and villages in which they live.



Food and Landscape

There is an important link between food production and landscape character. It is important to analyse the Landscape Character Assessment for the area, sites of nature conservation and Biodiversity Action Plans, in order to identify what habitats are linked to local food production eg. orchards. This information should then be used to inform strategies and approaches to conserve valued habitats and landscapes.

Promotion

Awareness of the link between landscape and food production and the local produce itself needs to be actively promoted to urban populations. All avenues for promotion need to be explored eg, healthy living initiatives such as “walk to health” events could visit local producers on route.

Schools can form an important link in the awareness raising process. It is important to not only engage the children, but also their families. As well as the obvious healthy eating benefits there is a need to build on this by promoting links to local places and communities. Leaflets showing the landscape and habitats and the associated food could be used to inform families of the issues involved.



Useful contacts

South Gloucestershire Council

Stuart Bardsley
01454 863468
www.southgloslocalfood.org

Severn Estuary Partnership

02920 874713
www.severnestuary.net/sep/

Soil Association

0117 314 5000
www.soilassociation.org

Natural England

Eat The View
www.countryside.gov.uk/LAR/Landscape/ETV/index.asp

Somerset Food Links

www.foodlinks.org.uk

Slow Food

www.slowfood.com

The Organic Centre, Ireland

www.theorganiccentre.ie/index.html

Campaign to Protect Rural England

01454 322201
www.cpre.org.uk/

Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales

01938 552525
www.cprw.org.uk/home.htm

Environment Agency

www.environment-agency.gov.uk

Vale of Glamorgan Council

01446 704600

Cardiff Council

029 20 873185

Newport City Council

01633 232164

Monmouthshire County Council

01633 644644

Forest of Dean District Council

01594 812615

Gloucestershire County Council

01452 425679

Bristol City Council

0117 922 2000

North Somerset Council

01934 888888

Somerset County Council

01823 355455

Sedgemoor District Council

01278 435435



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