

Case Study

Shropshire Hills Farmers Markets



Summary

Six Farmers Markets around the Shropshire Hills have worked together on market research, joint promotion and other development. Results have included significant increases in the economic scale, closer connection to environmental aims and creation of strong networks of market organisers and producers on which to base further work.

What has been done

In May 2005 the Ludlow 21 Food & Farming Group organised a conference on 'Growing the Local Food Economy'. Attended by 44 people, this clarified a range of development actions for the local food sector. The South Shropshire Food Events Group was formed to focus on a collaborative approach to developing Farmers Markets. Funding was provided by the AONB's Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) in 2005-6 for market research with customers and a survey of producers. Six Farmers Markets were included: Ludlow, Craven Arms, Knighton, Church Stretton, Much Wenlock and Bishop's Castle. These towns all lie immediately around or within the Shropshire Hills AONB. The research findings were published in a report and fed back to producers in the first ever gathering of farmers market stallholders from across the area.

From this sound basis of knowledge, and based on the trust and relationships established between the market organisers, a second phase of joint marketing and development was prepared. Further SDF funding in 2006-7 supported the creation of a shared 'Shropshire Hills' brand for the markets, promotion material (posters, fliers, signs and banners), and paid time for co-ordination of a re-launch. Organisational changes were made to some markets based on the research including a change of venue and increases in frequency.

The relaunch took place in October 2006, generating 11 newspaper and magazine articles and radio coverage. Evaluation monitored the impact of the relaunch through monitoring of stall numbers, customer numbers and targeted questionnaires.



Economic benefits

- Expanded markets – number of stalls and frequency of smaller markets increased, record numbers of customers, gaps filled on types of produce available
- Meetings with B&B owners – connecting the local food & drink sector with tourism
- Jobs safeguarded – Farmers Markets ‘crucial’ or ‘important’ to 74% of producers

Social benefits

- Strong collaborative network established of Farmers Market organisers and other partners
- Training event provided for producers on direct selling techniques
- Health benefits from fresh, unprocessed foods
- Increased awareness, and closing of gap between consumers and food producers

Environmental benefits

- Reduced food miles and CO2 emissions – almost all produce sourced from within 30 miles
- Support for sustainable production methods – many producers are organic or low intensity
- Building sense of connection between local food and the landscape



Next steps

- Creation of a web-based local products directory including environmental accreditation, working with the Rural Hub and National Rural Knowledge Exchange.
- Establishment of a distribution network to help producers work together to reach wider markets, especially in tourism and public sector procurement.

Lessons

- Early consultation with relevant stakeholders resulted in wide support for the work.
- The enthusiasm of certain key volunteers, and support and funding from the AONB were both vital to the success of the project.
- Collaborative working between markets increased the effectiveness of their operation.
- Adopting a collective ‘Shropshire Hills’ brand provided the markets with a unifying identity, while supporting a broader aim to develop sense of place for the Shropshire Hills.

“Bishop’s Castle market had 19 stalls, more than two thirds of which are new to the market. The majority of producers had seen an increase in takings since October.”

Ludlow 21 2006-7 SDF project report

Further information

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Research report at www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/publications/pubs.htm#fmkt