

## KEYNOTE NOTES

Positive, confident. These are ideas whose time has come.

Food is not the same as other products. To ask for what we think is healthy food not an outlandish or unattainable demand, but more like a basic human right.

As a species, we have spent fifty years obsessed by quantity at the expense of quality, yet on a global scale, 50% of food production wasted. Last year, in Britain, nearly a billion ready-meals were consumed..

Now the words organic & sustainable have become trendy concepts,

used by management gurus, politicians and business leaders

In the last year, commercialisation of organic: trendy but will continue to grow as we continue to ask fundamental questions about the safety and real value of modern food production and distribution systems.

Current Outlook very encouraging & improving

- There is a wide range of positive & successful models, with experience
- National & local support organisations
- Ever-increasing awareness & concern about food-related issues by consumers and decision-makers whether they are managers / politicians

Does this add up to a groundswell of support? –THE GAP

How to turn public opinion in support of the local food agenda into reality?

Realistic about how much is possible and how long it will take to achieve

Local food initiatives

Food Futures (Broomfield) / Projects which develop the local food culture & economy:

**Production:** Grow Your Own / Allotments / Smallholders / Community Composting / Recycling Schemes / City Farms / Community Gardens / Community Supported Agriculture / Subscription Farming

**Distribution:** Farmers' Markets / Food Co-Ops / Box Schemes / Community Cafes / Lunch Clubs / Healthy Eating / Community Nutritionists / Food Poverty Strategies / W.I. Markets / Local Food Directories / Horticultural Therapy / L.E.T.S. / Credit Unions / Fairtrade / Buy & Shop Local

Copy / borrow / present opportunity to innovate

Mix & match to find Appropriate solutions for specific communities  
pragmatic about what works

Inclusive            appeal to all sections of society: young & old / urban &  
rural /

rich & poor / new & established communities            interaction > exclusion

**Personal / SOFI** I myself have been a local grower for the last ten years. When I began, I was motivated by wanting to eat as much organic food as possible, grown in the most environmentally-friendly way possible. At that time, organic food was expensive and I wanted to save money, but also the supply was less reliable than it is now, even for seasonal staples. Supply is now more reliable and the cost has reduced, but the vast majority of organic produce is imported from around the world (80%).

After ten years' practice, I've learnt how to grow a huge range of vegetables, fruits, nuts and herbs to a good standard. For the past five years, I've been cultivating nearly two acres, made up of eight allotments and a large kitchen garden. I manage to grow more than two tonnes of food per year, which is about half the food I eat. I also distribute a lot of my surplus to reward volunteers and students.

Currently, there seems to be a great need for basic help and advice, which is not offered by the education and training sector. I've spent a lot of time helping and supporting dozens of people get started. I've recently obtained funding to allow me to set up a project to help my local community learn to grow their own organic food.

With my colleague, Darrell Maryon, we have set up a charitable educational Trust, Sheffield Organic Food Initiative, to promote organics for the relief of poverty and its benefits to health. From my point of view, fresh organic food should be seen as a basic necessity rather than an unaffordable luxury. For communities and group food-growing projects, organic techniques may seem to involve more hard work, but they are safer, more appropriate for small-scale production and more likely to be successful in the long run. Not to mention the benefits of improved taste, flavour and nutritional value.

It's vital to state clearly that the word organic is a relative, not an absolute term. It's not something which is black and white. If a commercial producer wants to sell organic produce, there are strict criteria that must be met, but for small-scale, amateur growers, it's sufficient to be as organic as possible. Many conventional, commercial producers still rely on a foundation of common-sense, organic cultivation techniques and are beginning to see that it is possible to reduce and omit the chemicals they do use, which reduces their production costs & make more profit by growing organic produce of all kinds.

The market demand for organic produce is currently increasing by 100% every year, so there is a realistic prospect that smallholders and farmers will be able to make a living growing organically. The amount of land registered as organic in Britain is also currently doubling annually, over 100,000 hectares going into conversion last year.

The majority of people I meet who are starting allotments are motivated by wanting to grow their own supply of organic food. Allotments are still the only way that most people can get access to enough land to grow a meaningful amount of food. At present, it's often a heroic struggle to clear neglected and derelict plots. A lot of beginners give up, but those that succeed in these adverse conditions could achieve so much more with greater support and resources. We can achieve so much more together than working alone or in isolation.

As well as increasing the output, range & quality of locally-grown food, I think that a revitalised local food culture could generate a huge range of personal and social

benefits for all types of community, especially for economically-deprived and socially-excluded members of society.

How Potential / expansion / regeneration

Maintain motivation & match ambition with support

Encourage & support individuals' and communities' ambitions

Practical and people-based activities / Opportunities for all

Diverse / Consensus / Inclusive / mutual support / alliances /

Funding: Additionality - meet core outputs + add-on soc./ community value

Demonstrate effectiveness, don't lose sight of the purpose (funding-led)

Why The rational response to modern food crises is not the hysterical headlines in the tabloids, but to decide to take back more control over what we eat. As a promoter of organic growing, I have been delighted that issues such as genetic engineering are controversial, because more and more people are now questioning other aspects of their food supply: whether that is the over-use of chemicals in production and processing, the over-exploitation of natural and human resources involved in the global food market or any number of other current problems (and that's before the worst effects of global warming or any potential dangers from genetically-modified organisms!)

We have to be conscious of the impact of modern diet on health. There seem to be so many modern illnesses which are related to diet, whether it's hyperactivity in children or chronic fatigue syndrome in adults: food allergies and intolerances: anorexia or bulimia: or our modern addictions to purified foods, such as salt, fats, sugar, coffee and chocolate.

I don't want to stop anybody from eating what they like, but I think it would be good if we had more opportunities to choose fresh, natural, living food instead of the pseudo-food and virtual vegetables that are manufactured by the mass food industry.

If we believe that we are what we eat or even that food should be regarded as a form of medicine, it's easy to see the contribution that can be made to the prevention and treatment of disease. In this sense, the provision of fresh food can be seen as a Local Health Service to match & compliment the NHS,

Scientific studies are now regularly confirming the health benefits of fresh, natural food. It has also been proved that exposure to probiotic soil bacteria during childhood stimulates the immune system and reduces susceptibility to disease in later life. In my experience, many people who have suffered a major health crisis value organic produce as part of their therapy and recovery programme

Inspiring ending, We have a chance to help revitalise our food cultures. Modern society and technology are surely capable of providing us with this most essential of necessities: fresh, healthy food.

# Box Schemes / Food Co-ops / Community Buying

Facilitator: Richard Clare from Sheffield's Organic Food Initiative

## INTRODUCTION:

The majority of my diet is made up of vegetables and fruit I've grown myself. It took me more than ten years to achieve this level of self-sufficiency and I'm very conscious that few people have the time, energy and motivation to grow their own food. Most of us rely on others to provide us with our daily bread. But there are viable alternatives to the supermarkets' domination of our food chain.

For the past 15 years, I have shopped at my local food co-operative, which has grown from a few bags of lentils and rice into a thriving small business with a considerable turnover and a dozen employees. They have also operated a box scheme for the past ten years, supplied by the Organic Marketing Company, which delivers fresh from the farm to more than 250 people each week.

Both cases ( growing and distributing ) have required personal sacrifices and dedication, but can now be seen as successful demonstrations of alternative food strategies. It may be impossible to compete with the supermarkets on cost, but there are other measures of value, such as freshness, localness, quality and trust.

We have to accept that the supply and variety of locally-grown produce is limited at present and it may take a long time to make it more widely available. There are several tried and tested models which distribute nutritious food at an affordable price.

The Co-operative Wholesale Society (the original Co-op and Britain's largest farmer) has recently compiled an excellent resource pack to support new start-ups.

## **WHAT EXISTS?**

### **WHERE?**

## **WHAT IS NEEDED?**

### **WHY?**

- **COMMUNITY / VOLUNTARY**
- **STATUTORY / GOVERNMENT / POLITICAL**
- **COMMERCIAL / BUSINESS**

## **BARRIERS / PROBLEMS ?**

## **PARTNERSHIPS / NETWORKING?**

## **PROGRESS?**

- **FUNDING**
- **TRAINING**

## **SUPPORT**

