

FOOD FUTURES WORKSHOPS

Joint Finance would be used to fund a series of one-day workshops, one element of a larger project, the Soil Association's Food Futures Programme.

Food Futures is a 3-year national project to develop the local food economy through supporting and creating community-based food growing and distribution schemes alongside local networks. The Soil Association will run 15 individual 18-month programmes in various parts of the UK. Each programme is designed to help find practical solutions and initiate action for developing a sustainable local food and farming culture and economy. A series of at least six workshops will provide a focus for attracting participants from all sectors, leading to the formation of a core group and action groups to address specific topics. The expertise and experience of the Soil Association will be available to support local participants.

The programme is designed to be adapted for a wide range of locations, from rural agricultural communities to urban inner/outer city estates. The underlying principles are of community subsidiarity and empowerment, partnerships and genuine participation where each person is valued for their own particular area of understanding and to build on what already exists in a complementary, non-competitive way.

This project sets a broad and inclusive agenda, addressing issues which are of concern across all sectors. The proposed process would provide a mechanism for raising the profile of the local food-growing community, which is presently under-represented and under-valued. It aims to build up the confidence of producers and potential producers and engage wider support. It will provide a forum capable of forming a consensus between consumers, individuals, communities, authorities and producers in response to widespread and increasing demand for sustainably-produced, locally-grown food.

One of the aims of Food Futures is to find ways of making locally-produced organic food more accessible to low-income families and to multi-cultural communities. Organic food is often perceived to be a luxury for the white, monied middle-classes and Food Futures seeks to address this issue by involving local people in deciding for themselves where local food schemes are needed and what kind of schemes they want to create.

Experience shows that it is not easy starting new local food projects. Yet the solutions are usually straightforward and often tried and tested elsewhere. Food Futures offers the valuable lessons learnt by the Soil Association and others with guidance, support and technical input throughout the programme as required. The Food Futures programme will provide a framework within which projects can be developed, linked together and a strong local network can be built.

We are aware of several locally-based and sector-specific projects which are at the planning and implementation stage in Sheffield. These include the Healthy Gardening group's £ 90,000 bid to the Lottery to fund a city-wide network of support workers for community-scale gardening projects, Heeley City Farm's £ 30,000 bid to the Environmental Action Fund for a Local Food Links development worker and a £ 100,000 bid by Sheffield Health for research into Food Poverty. Many other projects with food-growing components are planned across Sheffield in the near future as part of the ongoing regeneration process and initiatives such as the Health Action Zones. We consider that Food Futures would contribute positively to all these initiatives and help optimise their effectiveness.

SCOPE:

- Develop the local food culture and economy
- Stimulate production to meet the demand for organic and locally-grown food
- Improve interaction between urban and rural communities
- Promote the social benefits of food-related activities in community capacity-building and regeneration

PROCESS:

- Establish a forum to engage current and potential contributors to and beneficiaries of the local food sector
- Core group and local development worker to co-ordinate local network
- Action groups to focus on specific areas of interest
- Training workshops to provide national organisation's expertise to local representatives

OUTPUTS:

- Establish at least 3 sustainable local food initiatives.
- Improve inter-agency co-operation and collaboration.
- Increase access to local and organically-grown food for people on low incomes and in multi-cultural communities.
- Establish relevant training and education opportunities.
- Develop and support projects which contribute positively to the local food sector.

The **workshops** will produce several positive outcomes. They will provide an opportunity to network and develop contacts amongst the local food-growing community. They will act as a means of distributing useful information, including funding opportunities. They will help people to access general advice and detailed consultation to help develop local food projects.

The **programme** aims to improve direct access to local food and food-growing opportunities. This will generate several benefits relevant to health. Positive improvements to general health and wellbeing, through increased exercise and outdoor activity. Increased component of fresh, seasonal vegetables, herbs, fruits and nuts in diet. Improved nutrition related to increasing consumption of organic produce, containing higher levels of vitamins, trace elements and nutrients than in chemically-grown and processed foods.

Milestones developing from the programme as a whole would include the setting up of the following local food initiatives:

Grow Your Own / Community Composting / L.E.T.S. / Credit Unions / Food Co-ops / Community-Supported Agriculture / Subscription Farming / Farmers' Markets / W.I. Markets / Local Organic Certification and Conversion / Local Food Directories / Buy Local Campaign / Fair-trade

We have successfully applied for £ 5,000 to fund initial development work from Sheffield Community Enterprise Development Unit. We are applying to Sheffield Training and Enterprise Council to fund the Soil Association's extra costs, £ 10,000 . We hope to combine these contributions with the Soil Association's expenditure, £ 17,000 to secure match-funding from the city-wide round of S.R.B. to meet the costs of a local development worker and administrative expenses.

We would anticipate that further applications for funding specific initiatives arising out of the activities of the action groups is likely over the lifetime of the project.

Food Futures will engage and work co-operatively with all communities, acknowledging the value of every food culture. The central theme of the project, local food, is a subject which can appeal equally to all communities. We will try to ensure that black and ethnic minorities are represented by involving an inclusive social cross-section in the Core group. The proposed budget for the conferences includes a figure for translating publicity into other languages.

Food Futures will specifically promote the interests of a range of deprived, socially-excluded and often isolated communities. It will aim to raise the profile of the local food-producing sector which is currently under-represented and under-resourced. We hope to investigate mechanisms to make resources and opportunities available to help these groups and individuals.

At workshops, childcare facilities will be provided.

We anticipate that projects aided by Food Futures will create new opportunities to join in with food-growing activities for those such as carers who find it difficult to achieve as much on their own.

Local Authority - Local Agenda 21, Economic Regeneration, Community Development, Anti-Poverty, Capacity Building

Health - Nutrition and Exercise, Mental Health Care, Health Promotion and Education
Voluntary Sector And Community Groups - Skills Development and Training,

Job Creation, Local Action, Diversionary Activities, Local Business Support,
Environmental Groups - Conservation, Waste Management, Food Miles, Campaigns

Farmers and Growers - Business Stability and Growth, Customer Relations,
New Marketing Strategies, Links with Local Communities, Education

City Farms, Allotment Groups - Training, Education, Social Events, Small Producers

Food Retailers and Distributors, existing Local Food Links Schemes, Business Stability
and Growth, Local Food Sources, Lower Transportation Costs

Local Universities / Colleges - Socio-economic Research, Opportunities for Placements

National organisations -- National Food Alliance, Henry Doubleday Research Assoc.

Ongoing project evaluation will be a responsibility of the Core group.

The proceedings of the workshops will be recorded. Positive outcomes of the process will be publicised through a newsletter.

Within the next 3 - 6 months, we hope to:

1. Secure contribution to S.A.'s costs (£ 10,000 over 18 months) and
2. Secure commitment of Soil Association
3. Approach S.R.B. to gain match-funding for local development worker
4. Proceed to organise workshops, core and action groups

Project finance will be managed by the Healthy Gardening Group in co-operation with other sponsoring organisations, S.O.F.I. and Food Futures once it is legally constituted. The sponsoring organisations will handle the details of day-to-day spending.

Support work for the project is currently provided on a part-time basis by Sheffield Organic Food Initiative Trust, supplemented by secondments of worker time from the Council (Rachel Wileman, L.A. 21 Co-ordinator) and Sheffield Health (Jo Ly, H.G.G. support worker) and volunteers (Rose Tanner). We anticipate that this team will be sufficient to organise the workshops. We hope that this will be supplemented by other committed core group members and partnerships with other organisations. We plan to appoint a dedicated local development worker as soon as practicable.

There is a specific requirement of the Food Futures project, under National Lottery criteria, to target deprived and minority communities. This commitment includes favourable consideration of employment opportunities for economically-deprived and unemployed people.

NOTE:--

The Healthy Gardening Group is currently in the process of adopting a constitution and setting up a management committee, in preparation for implementing its bid to the National Lottery. The Group has existed as a partnership between voluntary and statutory sectors since 1994. In 1997, the Group funded research into community gardening and compiled a directory of individuals and projects. Over the past three

years, the Group has administered five rounds of small grants to community gardening projects, GROW grants, funded by Sheffield Health.