

Could you tell us what Forres Feast is all about?

Forres Feast was set up by Forres Area Food Producers to raise the profile of local organically grown fresh produce from small-scale growers, supplying households and visitors through local and online shops.



The weekly Saturday Pop-Up Shop in Forres High Street, held from June to October 2019, has fostered closer collaboration and a more defined group identity so that we can align with wider food and drink initiatives currently emerging in Moray, including the Moray Food Growing Strategy which is currently being developed by Moray Council and the proposed Moray Speyside Regional Food Group, led by Moray Speyside Tourism and flagship food and drink businesses in the region.

The highlight was an intergenerational celebratory meal in Forres Town Hall on October 5th 2019, attended by 200 people from across the community, where this fresh produce took pride of place on the plate, alongside eggs, meat, fish, artisan bread, craft beer and single malt whisky from local family

businesses.

The learning has been captured in a commissioned scoping study: **Forres Feast: a study of local food from Earth to table.**

Project objectives:

- Strengthen the links between small-scale producers, distributors and restaurateurs to ensure continuity of supply throughout the seasons
- Develop a defined group identity to serve as the basis of a community engagement strategy, including a presence on the Moray Speyside Tourism website, to ensure ongoing sustainability after the pilot project concludes;
- Run a pilot Saturday Pop-Up Shop in Forres High Street from May to October 2019 in order to test feasibility of attendance at possible future local farmers markets
- Hold a community meal in Forres Town Hall in October to celebrate quality local food and drink and to encourage everyone to think local first when purchasing food and drink
- Exchange knowledge between growers and provide opportunities for informal apprenticeships in sustainable horticulture practices
- Engage with community groups to make good food accessible to all through sharing harvest surpluses and making sure good food doesn't go to waste
- Work with emerging initiatives such as the Moray Food Growing Strategy and Moray Speyside Regional Food Group, to highlight the importance of small-scale producers within the food and drink sector and to ensure continuity after the end of this project

You were awarded Connect Local regional food funding in 2019. What have you used this funding for and how has it helped the development of the project?

We used the Connect Local funding for the following activities:

- Produce a scoping study of the small-scale producers in the Forres area supplying fresh organically grown fruit, vegetables, salads and herbs to online and local shops, as well as directly to local households and visitors in short supply chains
- Develop a group identity and a community engagement strategy for Forres Area Food Producers
- Hold a Saturday Pop-Up Shop in Forres High Street from June to October 2019
- Hold Forres Feast in Forres Town Hall on October 5th 2019.

These activities have helped in the development of the project in the following ways:



- Discussions at the final project meeting on October 21st 2019 show that, on reflection, the Producers agreed unanimously that the project had exceeded expectations and had more than met the project objectives. Being on the High

Street in Forres was key to raising the profile of Forres Area Food Producers, both in the Pop-Up Shop and at the Feast.

- People in Forres and the surrounding area have more awareness of the availability of local fresh organically grown fruit and vegetables. The feedback gathered in the Pop-Up Shop, at the Feast and online have highlighted not only an enthusiasm for having fresh fruit and vegetables available in Forres High Street, but a recognition from our customers that the High Street itself will benefit from another active business, albeit only once a week. The research highlighted a strong message that people would like to see the pop-up shop back next season.
- Demand exceeds supply in all our current outlets and we are not yet able to take on new customers, with the exception of a small regular weekly order for one of the producers. This has two main causes: the loss of one key grower just before the project started; the difficult season, which resulted in lower yields and some crop failures.
- We have identified a need to increase production in 2020 and beyond to meet demand, on existing farms and gardens and to attract new growers who meet the criteria set by the group. This will also require training of volunteers and hopefully apprentices to help to increase production.
- The scoping study, Forres Feast: a study in local food from Earth to table, the Pop-Up Shop and the planning and delivery of the Feast have all brought a closer collaboration between producers: shared delivery; shared workloads at times of greatest need; volunteer and paid support between members of the group; shared projects – apple juice, hedgerow jelly – both very small initiatives in themselves, but opening up possibilities for expanding joint working and processing opportunities.

Why is it so important to raise the profile of quality fresh local produce?

Quality fresh local produce delivers multiple benefits to the local community:

- Has economic benefits to the producers, as well as to local shops and online businesses;
- Shortens food chains and delivery times, reducing food miles, reducing packaging, ensuring freshness and delivering health benefits to local people;
- Celebrates the Moray's long tradition of market gardens, orchards and walled gardens and ensures the future health of its fertile soils by using sustainable farming practices and enhancing biodiversity in a county that is host to several iconic flora and fauna species;
- Showcases the high quality of fruit, vegetables, salads and herbs to local people and visitors to Moray.

In the written and verbal feedback from customers at the Pop-Up Shop, the vitality of the fruit and vegetables was cited as a valued aspect of the quality of the produce.

However, the variables that set this produce apart from the supermarket food are that of:

- **Organic**
- **Fresh**
- **Taste**
- **Local**

It isn't possible these days to discuss food and farming without reference to the increasing evidence that both our global food system and our environment are in crisis now and need creative solutions.

Forres Area Food Producers believes that global issues are best addressed through local initiatives and informed local communities that take a multi-disciplined approach. International connections give a context and motivation for local action.

Scientists are warning of a potentially deadly combination of factors, including climate change, mass loss of species, topsoil erosion, forest felling and acidifying oceans. The UK's leading progressive think tank, the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) says human impacts have reached a critical stage and threaten to destabilise society and the global economy.

(Source: <https://www.ippr.org/research/publications/age-of-environmental-breakdown>.)

The Forres Feast project explored these issues in Section 5 of the scoping study - Forres Feast: a study in local food from Earth to table.

Here is an extract from Section 5.2:

Below is a selection of various policies and published documents pertaining to food sustainability / security, and the local economy, environment, climate change and agriculture, at an international, national and more local level.

Food Policy & Sustainability

Scotland was one of the first countries to sign up to the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#).

Relevant goals are: 1,2,3,8,10,11, 12,15, 17

Food Policy & Climate Change

A recent publication: "**Food, Farming, and the Climate Crisis: How we can feed people and cool the planet**", published by Oli Rodker, Ele Saltmarsh, Adam Payne and Jyoti Fernandes for The Landworkers Alliance, 2019, talks about the following issues:

The Landworkers' Alliance (LWA) is a grassroots union of small-scale, ecological and family farmers across the UK. They campaign and lobby for the rights of producers.

Reducing Expansion onto our Global Carbon Sinks

This discusses the fact that agricultural emissions are separated from the wider food system, obscuring the different impacts of local and global supply chains.

A large part of global deforestation is caused by expansion of intensive farming, but in the monopolisation of fertile lands for commodity and cash crops pushes peasant farmers and local food production onto marginal lands that are degraded and become net CO2 emitters. The UK needs to localise its food production to avoid shifting emission impacts elsewhere.

Local and Regional Supply Chains

The climate importance of local food is often underestimated because transport emissions are the only metric used. However, local sales tend to also involve significantly less processing, packaging, refrigeration and waste.

Direct sales between farmers and local customers through short supply chains can reduce the climate cost of food by reducing supply chain emissions. Buying direct from a local producer can halve the climate impact of food. Local food sales will have beneficial impacts for local economies, that will offset any economic losses from reduced processing and transport.

Less, Better Meat; More Fruit and Veg

An increase in domestic production of fruit and vegetables for local sale through direct to customer local supply chains would provide an optimisation of reduced food system emissions and public health. In turn, employment opportunities in horticulture would be created as a higher per-ha labour sector than meat and dairy production.

Food Policy & Reconnecting to Food



Another report feeds into the themes of local economy, environment and climate change – **“Eating from the farm: the social, environmental and economic benefits of local food systems”**, a Friends of the Earth Europe report, 13 April 2015.

This briefing looks at:

- Communities who are taking control of the food revolution, and bypassing supermarkets to reconnect citizens with the food they eat and the people that produce it

Food Policy & Consumption

A quote from **Wendell Berry**, American novelist, farmer and poet, from his 1989 essay ‘On the pleasures of eating’ states that:

“Eating is an agricultural act.” But what does this actually mean? According to Berry: “Most people think of food as an agricultural product, but they do not think of themselves as participants in agriculture; they just think of themselves as ‘consumers’.”

Food Policy & Sustainable Agriculture

“Towards a Sustainable Agriculture--The Living Soil”, was a [renowned address](#) given by the late Lady

Eve Balfour to IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements) conference in Switzerland in 1977.

It built on her work in the 1940s recorded in her seminal book "The Living Soil" published in 1943.

There are various relevant and forward-thinking policies in Scotland:

[Organic Action Plan](#)

[Land Use](#)

[Climate Change](#)

[Health](#)

[Food Policy](#)

[Food Policy](#)

[Food Policy](#)

[Moray Council Food Growing Strategy:](#)

Developed in accordance with the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015; the strategy is currently in an 8 week consultation period and [mapping](#).

Do you have anything exciting planned for 2020?

The first stage of our future thinking and development will focus on monthly producer meetings during the winter to discuss the issues that have arisen during this first stage of the project. This discussion will include an examination of funding implications for some aspects of our development as a cooperative group. The following priorities were identified:

- Increase productivity in all existing businesses
- Work together to plan the balance of supply and demand at all seasons, starting with planning for winter/spring 2019/20
- Build on existing cooperation to purchase seed, compost and packaging; to share equipment and to share labour at peak times
- Recruit and train new staff and volunteers both in individual businesses and in the Pop-Up Shop
- Explore and develop an effective apprenticeship

scheme to ensure a real legacy for the Forres Area Food Producers

- Increase supply to existing wholesale customers and food outlets and hopefully to find new customers in these sectors

The highlights of our plans will be to respond to the unanimous requests from written and verbal customer feedback to bring the Pop-Up Shop back to Forres High Street in summer/autumn 2020, and to celebrate the next season's harvest with a Feast in Forres Town Hall in September 2020, capturing the spirit of community and culture which was the hallmark of Forres Feast 2019.

An unfulfilled plan during the project was a programme of visits for growers to each other's gardens. This was not possible to include in the busy part of the season, when the gardens looked their best, but the opportunities for onsite planning in the early spring of 2020, at all the farms and gardens would make visits at these quiet times invaluable.

Just like the seeds which lie dormant in the ground after the abundance of summer and the ripening of autumn, the achievements, ideas and learnings in recorded in the scoping study will be sown in the land next season by the Forres Area Food Producers and the products of their labour will hopefully be back on Forres High Street in 2020 in response to the requests from enthusiastic Pop-Up Shop customers and guests at the Feast.

Connect Local is delivered by a team of experts from SAC, SAOS, Scotland Food & Drink and Seafood Scotland and funded by Scottish Government and European Maritime and Fisheries Fund.

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