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**18<sup>th</sup> September 2015**

**To: The Mayor and each member of Limerick City and County Council**

**Re: Draft Food Strategy for Limerick 2016-2018**

**A Chomhairleoir, a chara,**

Limerick City and County Council through the Local Enterprise Office commissioned the development of an “Integrated strategy for Micro Food Producers in Limerick City and County”. Following research this brief was widened to a “Food strategy for Limerick” to allow for a more holistic approach covering all food stakeholder groups.

The draft report entitled “Limerick City and County Council Food Strategy for Limerick 2016 – 2018” was considered by the Economic Development Enterprise and Planning Special Policy Committee on Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> September 2015. The report and recommendations, with minor amendments, were approved and recommended to the Council for approval.

The report executive summary is as follows:

*Research conducted indicated that Limerick had much strength in its food sector including the following:*

- *Improved diversity in Limericks food offer in recent years*
- *A growing food producer base*
- *New emerging food festivals*
- *New enthusiasm from food stakeholders*

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*The research also indicated some weaknesses:*

- *A small number of speciality producers*
- *No “joined up thinking” with regard to developing food*

*Following benchmarking with other regions nationally and internationally, a strategy was formulated. This strategy is broken into 2 sections.*

- *Short term actions*
- *Longer term considerations*

*The key short term actions:*

- *To develop a united food community*
- *To improve business skill sets*

*The considerations recommended for the longer term are:*

- *Tell the Limerick Food story*
- *Develop a food zone*
- *Put enablers in place to support the strategy roll out*

*Suggested detailed activities for the short term actions have been set out in the document, along with lists of considerations for the longer term phase. An action list has also been set out to help “roadmap the journey”. It is envisaged that local stakeholders groups will take ownership of these activities and there is a recommendation to put a steering group in place to guide the process and also that a facilitator be appointed to ensure implementation is facilitated by a dedicated resource.*

The Food Strategy for Limerick 2016 – 2018 is hereby submitted to the Council for its consideration and adoption.

Eamon Ryan



Head of Enterprise  
Local Enterprise Office

## Amendments to Limerick Food Strategy 18 09 15

Following a presentation to the Economic Development, Enterprise & Planning Strategic Policy committee, a number of recommendations/edits were suggested at this session and have been taken on board as set out below.

- *Role of University of Limerick.* Incorporated into page 30
- *Possibility of Limerick show hosting the food “super festival”.* Already included page 33
- *Linkages to the Shannon College of Hotel Management should be explored.* Incorporated into page 36
- *Promotion of allotments.* Incorporated into page 32
- *Encouraging Limerick restaurants to buy local food.* Incorporated on page 32
- *Cluster approach.* Incorporated into page 27
- *Linking producers directly to the consumer.* Incorporated on page 30
- *Role of Innovate Limerick.* Incorporated on page 38
- *Limerick Milk Market.* Further reference inserted on page 28
- *Use of new LEADER funding.* Incorporated on page 39



## **Limerick City and County Council Food Strategy for Limerick 2016 – 2018**



***“To enhance Limerick’s reputation for great food and to build on existing support structures designed to help maximise the economic prosperity for its food stakeholders.”***

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## Message from Limerick City and County Council

**To be completed by LEO**

## Executive Summary

Limerick City and Council Council via the Local Enterprise Office commissioned development an “Integrated strategy for Micro Food Producers in Limerick City and County”. Following research this brief was widened to a “Food strategy for Limerick” to allow for a more holistic approach covering all food stakeholder groups

Research conducted indicated that Limerick had many strengths in its food sector including the following:

- Improved diversity in Limericks food offer in recent years
- A growing food producer base
- New emerging food festivals
- New enthusiasm from food stakeholders

The research also indicated some weaknesses:

- A small number of speciality producers
- No “joined up thinking” with regard to developing food

Following benchmarking with other regions nationally and internationally, a strategy was formulated. This strategy is broken into 2 sections.

- Short term actions
- Longer term considerations

The key short term actions:

- To develop a united food community
- To improve business skillsets

The considerations recommended for the longer term are:

- Tell the Limerick Food story
- Develop a food zone
- Put enablers in place to support the strategy roll out

Suggested detailed activities for the short term actions have been set out in the document, along with lists of considerations for the longer term phase. An action list has also been set out to help “roadmap the journey”. It is envisaged that local stakeholders groups will take ownership of these activities and there is a recommendation to put a steering group in place to guide the process and also that a facilitator be appointed to ensure implementation is facilitated by a dedicated resource

## **Introduction**

While the initial brief for this project was to “Develop an integrated strategy for Micro Food Producers in Limerick City and County”, it became clear from the research, that it would not be possible to formulate a strategy for micro food producers in isolation, without taking into account other food stakeholder groups. This resulted in the strategy brief being widened to develop a broader “Food strategy for Limerick”. This wider brief takes into account the total food system in Limerick which has a direct influence on the micro food producers in the county, and allows for more holistic vision to be developed.

The strategy is divided into two sections. The first addresses immediate short term actions which need to be taken to support the local micro food producer community. The second consist of a series of longer term considerations which should be explored as part of a wider food strategy encompassing other food cohorts. The purpose of the strategy is to help strengthen the many current good food initiatives, to encourage new activity and to support all stakeholders in the food sector by creating a structured environment for them to grow and develop.

## **Best Practice**

There are only a handful of counties in Ireland who currently have a dedicated food strategy. This Limerick strategy endeavours to take best practice from counties like Donegal, Kilkenny, etc. and implement the learnings from these in Limerick. This pioneering work will allow a distinct competitive advantage to be created for Limerick within the national food landscape.

## **Methodology**

Limerick City & County Council via The Local Enterprise Office commissioned this work and following a tender process, James Burke & Associates were appointed to facilitate the strategy formation, conduct the research and create a three year strategic plan. The methodology used included extensive research which was conducted in advance of formulating the strategy. The methodology included:

- Desk research on the international food sector
- Desk research on domestic food initiatives in other areas

- Face to face interviews with Limerick food stakeholders
- Focus groups with local food stakeholders
- A “Survey Monkey” research questionnaire seeking views of 143 stakeholders
- Communication with other state agencies involved in the food sector

## Why Does Limerick Need a Food Strategy?

Food Harvest 2020 is the Government's strategic vision for food development in Ireland. This has recently been updated in Food Wise 2025 and identifies a number of key focus areas for the food industry in the next 5 years. They recommend the following:

- Encourage and support market-led food entrepreneurship from the earliest stages of development
- Promote sustainable and locally embedded food procurement policies and systems. See Appendix 4
- Promote and broaden the opportunities, including local markets, for consumers and visiting tourists to purchase local food,
- Conserve and promote distinctive local food traditions at EU level and with bodies such as the TASTE Council and Slow Food
- Explore possibilities for mentoring by larger companies to support artisan companies achieve market distribution and build their customer base.
- Industry should work to reduce exchange rate exposure through market diversification and joint ventures with local companies
- Goals for local primary producers:
  - Increased returns
  - Greater supply chain co-ordination
  - Less exposure to price volatility
  - Greater economies of scale through less fragmented production base
  - Reduced costs
  - Higher productivity
  - Higher value output
- Goals for the local food industry:
  - Increased value added output
  - Greater consolidation and scale
  - Higher profitability
  - An enhanced SME (small to medium sized enterprises) base
  - Better targeted R&D
  - Enhanced market responsiveness

The food strategy for Limerick will be guided by Food Harvest 2020 and Food Wise 2025 and, will advance the policy and practice of the local and wider food system. This will expand the opportunity for Limerick food producers, retailers, foodservice operators (their supply chains) and food tourism.

## Strategy Objectives

### The Limerick Food Strategy Aims to

1. Grow the reputation of the Limerick food system's products and capabilities, improving its ability to respond to changing market needs and enhancing its attractiveness to investors
2. Create the right conditions for economic growth and opportunity creation within the Limerick food system
3. Better connect the existing Limerick food production, processing, retail and foodservice so as to increase interrelationships and generate shared value from both an economic and local network perspective
4. Propagate innovative practices to integrate local food production and supply within Limerick, thereby increasing positive impacts across the wider area

### Outcomes

The expected outcomes from implementation of the Limerick Food Strategy are numerous. The strategy engages in the changing food system landscape, anticipates opportunities and challenges, grows the food network, plans for action, and leads the way for a more secure economy in the future. The outcomes for the Limerick Food Strategy will include:

1. Stronger, more resilient food enterprises
2. More new businesses established with a focus on food
3. Increased national supply of Limerick food products
4. Increased export of food products from Limerick
5. Increased visitation to Limerick for food experiences, by people from outside the City and County
6. Increased local patronage of Limerick restaurants and local food outlets
7. Increased levels of innovation within the local food economy
8. More local food businesses offering healthy food choices
9. New network of "food leaders" established to connect all aspects of Limerick food
10. Stronger credentials for Limerick as a sophisticated food processing, retail and tourism destination

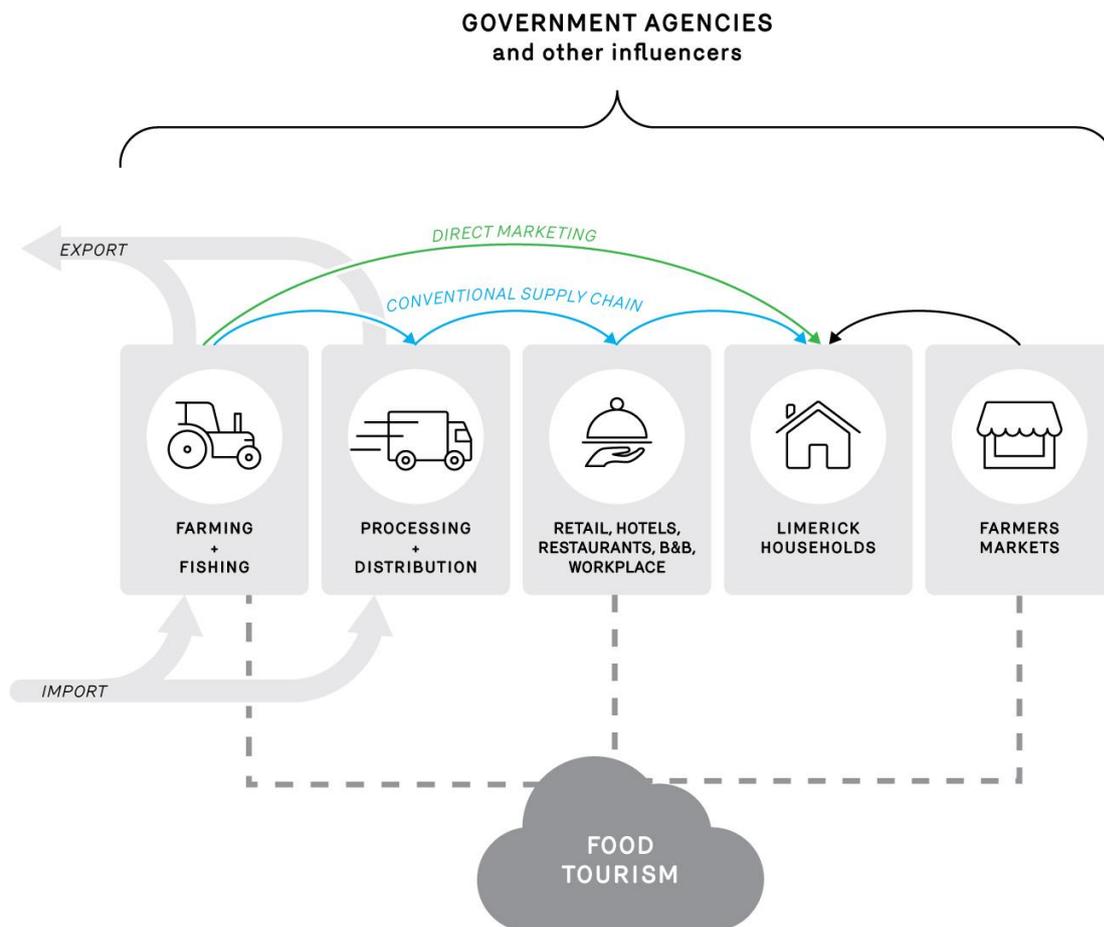
11. Increased opportunities for future jobs in food production, processing, retail and foodservice outlets
12. Expanded opportunity for food processors (and subsequently their supply chains)

## **Vision**

*The vision is to enhance Limerick's reputation for great food and to build on existing support structures designed to help maximise the economic prosperity for its food stakeholders.*

# Limerick Food Overview

## LIMERICK FOOD SYSTEM



**Figure 1: Limerick Food System**

Figure 1 shows the Limerick food system. Currently those farming, fishing and producing food are either supplying directly to the retail and foodservice sectors, working via local distributors, or have national distribution agreements in place. A smaller number of Limerick food producers have export arrangements in place.

Some Limerick farmers and producers utilise Limerick food markets to develop a direct route to market, usually on a weekly basis.

In many instances in the supply chain farmers and producers are involved in direct marketing activities to consumers via digital media and partner with foodservice operators to appear on menu descriptions etc.

Food systems are vitally important for the development of the local economy and it is well documented that food produced and sold within an area leads to the maximum amount of revenue staying within the local economy, particularly where the food is either sold directly to the consumer or via a locally owned third party food retailer/foodservice operator.

## **Limerick Agriculture**

County Limerick is part of the Golden Vale which is one of Europe's most noted grassland and dairy land areas. In the central bowl of the county the soil is extremely productive and fertile, with the only extensive hill region being in the west of the county bordering Cork and Kerry. The total land area is approximately 275,000 Ha's of which 73% is used for agriculture.

Research by the Irish Farmer's Association (2014 The Value of Agriculture at Country Level) showed the following:

There are over 5,991 farms in Limerick. The average farm size is 34.5ha. The number of dairy cows in Limerick stands at 94,066, there are also 44,214 beef cows, 1,319,109 poultry, 12,952 ewes and 4,572 sows.

In Limerick the primary agriculture of the county is valued at over €400 million, with the agri-sector here valued at €1.2 billion from this production. Dairying is the major enterprise in county Limerick, with approximately 7% of the national dairy production. Over 2,000 family farms are contracted with Teagasc with a satisfaction rating of almost 100%.

The value of forestry output is €4m and the value of agricultural exports arising from the agricultural output in the county is €553.0m

Agriculture in Limerick is extremely important as it supports thousands of jobs in the rural economy, both directly in food & drink processing and also in the wider agri-industry, including input suppliers, agricultural contractors, jobs in auctioneering, transport and engineering and in accountancy, and legal, veterinary and other advisory services.

The number of food and drink processing jobs supported by the agricultural output of Limerick County is over 2,838 and the number of food and drink processing jobs based in the local area (Mid-West Region – Clare, North Tipperary, and Limerick) reaches 4,457.

### **Limerick Food Landscape**

Limerick has a variety of food offers some of which are at early and developing stages, while others are well established. Some key features include:

- Limerick offers a large variety of successful local festivals and events, many of these festivals combine food as part of the experience.
- Limerick’s Milk Market (and the various events run at the market) is famous with Limerick residents and many at national level. The Saturday Milk Market in particular serves as a platform to showcase local food and has become part of the weekend shopping routine for many Limerick households
- Limerick has an array of award winning restaurants, cafes and bistros. There has been a notable increase in the diversity of the food offer in recent years
- Significant work has been completed by Ballyhoura Development Ltd in formulating a food strategy for their area. They have also run events focused at promoting the food credentials for the area and are an important catalyst for growth for its stakeholders
- Limericks food producer community has been growing in recent years with a growing base of artisan producers servicing the local market and a smaller number of larger food producers who are now finding their way onto the national retail mar

For a list of Limerick food businesses identified during this project see appendix 1.

## **Limerick Food in Tourism**

While Limerick has always had a tourism aspect, and some parts of the county benefit significantly from this, it is generally accepted that the city and county does not benefit as strongly as other areas do from the tourist visitor.

Some of the key tourist attractions in Limerick include:

- King John's Castle in Limerick which was refurbished in 2013
- Foynes Flying Boat Museum
- Lough Gur
- St.Mary's Cathedral & St. John's Cathedral
- Ballyhoura Mountains
- River Shannon
- Limerick City Gallery of Art
- Limerick City Museum
- Hunt Museum
- Cratloe Woods
- University of Limerick
- People's Park

Food tourism is beginning to evolve within Limerick and there are already examples of some establishments being famous for their food offer, which has given them destination status.

At national level Failte Ireland has focused on food tourism. Recent Failte Ireland research has identified that food is not the primary reason for tourists to visit Ireland, however 80% of those interviewed are "food positive" in other words a positive food experience can significantly enhance their experience. Therefore the focus should be on "food in tourism" as opposed to food tourism.

Some key recommendations from Failte Irelands "Food Tourism Plan 2014-2016" are:

- Producers should offer an authentic, high quality core product that's rooted in the locality
- Define and communicate compelling stories that create a sense of uniqueness
- Provide world class service standards but with genuine Irish hospitality
- Great Irish tourism experiences are being developed in response to the Brand Ireland experience pillars and targeted segments
- Food makes a significant contribution to the overall visitor experience and food offerings must respond to clearly defined expectations
- Compelling stories must lie at the heart of all experiences

These recommendations need to be embraced by Limerick as part of any “food in tourism” development.

## Limerick Food SWOT Analysis

Based on the authors experience in the Irish food sector, the feedback from stakeholders and international best practice the following SWOT analysis is reflective of the food dynamics within Limerick. The actions arising from this SWOT analysis will be dealt with in the recommendations section on page 24.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Strengths</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Strengthening of food offer in recent years</li> <li>-The Limerick Milk Market</li> <li>-Improved diversity of restaurants</li> <li>-Growing producer community</li> <li>-New emerging food festivals</li> <li>-Strong "pockets" of focused food activity e.g. Ballyhoura</li> <li>-Limerick is benefitting from wider positive consumer sentiment in recent years e.g. City of Culture</li> <li>-Strong enthusiasm, and appetite, within the Limerick food community for change and improvement</li> <li>-Interest in The Wild Atlantic Way</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Weaknesses</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Small number of speciality food retailers</li> <li>-Consumer at an earlier stage of food evolution than other areas</li> <li>-Little "joined up thinking" with overall local approach to food</li> <li>-Food markets infrastructure not developed (except for the Milk Market)</li> <li>-Limited funding supporting food initiatives</li> <li>-Under developed food tourism proposition</li> <li>-Weakness in consumer marketing of Limerick food</li> <li>-Economies of scale of many businesses</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Opportunities</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Developing a food brand for Limerick</li> <li>-Food tourism link to the Wild Atlantic Way</li> <li>-Upskilling the sector</li> <li>-Implementing a strong marketing plan for Limerick</li> <li>-Strong interest from many stakeholders in the establishment of a food strategy</li> <li>-Harnessing the expertise which was gained during the "year of culture"</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Threats</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Failure to work as a group</li> <li>-Lack of funding</li> <li>-Being over shadowed by other counties/areas who are more advanced in food</li> <li>-"The glass is half empty" mentality</li> </ul>

SWOT

## Trends in the Limerick Food System

Like all other areas Limerick is following similar trends to those on the national stage:

- A rise in nutrition awareness and a focus on healthy food
- Increased interest in the Limerick food culture
- Strong ongoing demand for locally grown products
- Growing export opportunities for producers who are export ready
- Innovations in food production and food manufacturing
- The food community is beginning to see the need to work together
- The Local Enterprise Office has strengthened their support for food producers with new programmes like “Kick Start Your Food Business” and “The Food Academy” as strong additions which have been activated over the last 24 months
- Limerick restaurants continue to win new food awards
- The last six years of economic difficulties have caused challenges for the food sector but there are some indicators that positive changes are occurring in this regard
- Food businesses are continuing to adapt to the changing need of the “consumer on the move”

## Stakeholders Feedback

The following quotes are taken from 1:1 stakeholder meetings/group meetings and are reflective of numerous other comments and recommendations which arose during the consultation period.

### Doing Well

*We have some great new exciting restaurants emerging*

*We definitely have stronger local food champions in recent years*

*Some of our Limerick food producers are beginning to develop a national presence*

*International food trends are now evident in some of our food offer*

*The selection of places to dine in Limerick is much wider than it was in the past*

### Need to Improve

*There is a big need for an umbrella food brand*

*More support should be given to setting up micro food businesses*

*Milk processing doesn't happen in the locality anymore and is all sent to Cork*

*Limerick ham has vanished*

*The quality of food and food presentation is much higher in other areas*

*Limerick is poor re food*

*Generally it is impossible to get good food*

*Producers need to lead the consumer*

*People don't know what food is produced locally*

*There is no Avoca type of retailer which is a problem for Limerick producers*

*We need to provide incubator kitchens and let people know they are available*

*We have no artisan bakery, no cheese shop, and no baked Limerick ham*

*Good café style food is missing*

*Difficult to get organic food and craft beer*

*There is no food tourism plan*

*Limerick has struggled with a collective food identity we have never had proper fusion because of the lack of vision. Brand Limerick is not there*

*Need to question are there extra days the Limerick food market can trade*

## **Tell the story**

*Golden Vale should be chosen as a brand for Limerick*

*Huge opportunity to link Limerick food and rugby, opportunity to link with rugby nutritionist and get local ingredients onto menu*

*We need to educate kids from primary school upwards about local food*

*We need a food charter*

*We need a believable brand*

*Need to encourage more “grow your own”*

*We need a producer directory to know what producers are in Limerick*

*We must tell the Limerick story better*

## **Working together**

*This strategy needs to be much bigger than Limerick and must incorporate the wider area*

*There is an opportunity to create a centre of food excellence and quality in LIT*

*We need a food network to join up the dots*

*We need to stand up collectively*

*There needs to be a single driving force*

*We have a history of the various agencies not talking to each other*

*Everyone says yes they will support but then they have to run their own business also*

*Food festivals need a dedicated person to organise the food aspect. There is a huge demand for foods at these events, however as the festival organisers have other priorities there is no one to organise the food events*

*LIT have a training college for chefs and hotels and could support this strategy*

## **Limerick Famous Food**

Stakeholders who inputted in the process were also asked what food Limerick was famous for.

The most common responses were:

- Pigtown (hams sent to Denmark)
- Limerick ham
- Limerick Beef
- O'Connell's butchers
- Flahavans butchers
- Gareth's butchers
- Adare farm
- Golden Vale
- Good farmland
- The Milk Market
- Irish Coffee (Foynes)
- Rugby/food link
- Dairy e.g. cheese
- Ranks flour
- Chip shops (Italian history going back to the 1920's)

## Online Survey

A survey monkey questionnaire was created which was sent to 143 food stakeholders of which 39 responded. The responses can be viewed as indicative but not statistically significant. 61.54% of respondents were food producers with a further 25.64% being foodservice operators. The full survey results can be seen in Appendix 2. The main summary findings are as follows:

- The **top challenges** faced by Limerick food businesses were:
  - Finance/cash issues including the following:
    - Raising funds
    - Day to day cash flow
  - Management issues including:
    - Time management
    - Managing staff and workload
  - Sourcing of ingredients and distribution of finished products
  - Communicating unique selling points and getting the customer to understand the food story was a challenge for many
  - Lack of profitability was also an issue
  
- There was very strong agreement that Limerick has a **great food story** to tell, however as a city and county **communicating the food story was poor.**
  
- There was significant agreement that the **organisation of food events** and activities was not as coordinated as it might be
  
- The **top priorities** which the food strategy should tackle first were identified as
  - The development of a strong food marketing campaign
  - The formation of a limerick food network
  - The clear communication of the food strategy
  
- Activities which the respondents favoured most were:
  - The creation of a Limerick food directory
  - The running of an annual Limerick food seminar
  - Topic specific evening workshops

- With regard to **training**, the provision of information about grant assistance was a unanimous priority followed by requests for training on improving business profitability and food business management
- When asked about **food festivals** a strong majority of respondents want to see a large scale dedicated Limerick food festival with interest also in combining entertainment/cultural events with food

## Desk Research

Appendix 3 contains desk research on other areas and how they approach supporting and growing their food businesses. The key learnings from this review are:

- The ratio of producers in Limerick is one food producer per 3,800 of population where the ratio is one food producer per 1,800 in Cork. This signifies lots of opportunity for Limerick
- There are good examples of food producer directories being used in other areas to link food producers with chefs and store owners
- Programmes which support the education and upskilling of producers are common supports. Some are already available at national level while others are local initiatives
- There are numerous examples of producer groups where networks are created with the specific objective of linking food buyers and sellers
- Consumer education and school food education programmes are an important element of a food strategy
- Linking with retailers and foodservice operators to communicate the local food producer story has yielded results in other areas
- Connecting primary producers with consumers/tourists should be embraced
- Farmers markets should be fostered as they provide early stage producers with a retail incubation platform
- There are numerous examples of food tourism initiatives linking local artisan production and tourists

## Recommendations/Limerick Strategic Food Framework

Following the research and strategic development, a framework was developed which concentrates on five key aspects over the next three years, which will drive success in Limerick.

### LIMERICK STRATEGIC FOOD FRAMEWORK

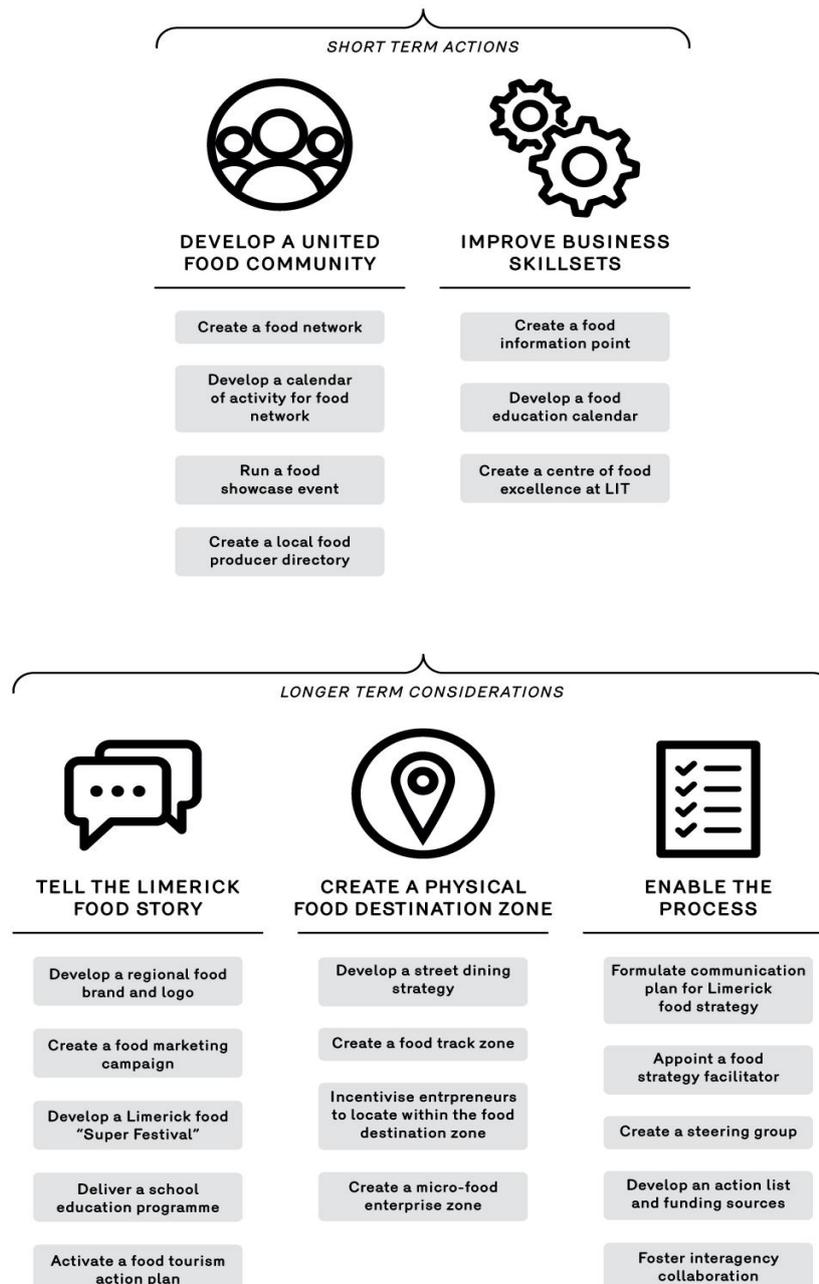


Figure 2: Limerick Food Strategy Food Framework

Figure 2 above is a summary of the five key recommendations and will act as a framework for the strategic implementation. Each of these five recommendations has been expanded over the following pages.

They have been divided into shorter term actions and longer term considerations. The shorter term actions are more specifically focused on the micro food producer community and are designed to be actioned quickly as they will act as a catalyst to growth among the producer community.

The longer term considerations focus on other aspects of the Limerick food landscape, outside of the producer group, and this report recommends that each one is explored and considered for future implementation. These future considerations will help accelerate the full Limerick food system.

### **Short Term Actions:**

#### **1. Develop a united food network**



If Limerick is to meet the vision for this strategy, it will be crucial that all stakeholders form a cohesive network which operates under a singular vision. The development of this network should include the following:

- Create a food network
  - Including food producers, food retailers, foodservice operators and other stakeholders
  - The network theme will revolve around marketing and networking
  - A network facilitator should be appointed to run events
  - Resources will need to be allocated to this network
  - A dedicated food network member online database and social media platform should be created
  
- Develop a calendar of activity for food network
  - Five network events should be run annually

- The structure will be:
  - One national food seminar
  - Three evening workshops with expert speakers and guests
  - One food producer showcase
- Possible themes for evening workshops
  - Where to find/how to apply for grant assistance and funding for your business
  - How to improve the profitability of the business
  - Harnessing food in tourism
  - Building your food brand online
- Ensure that min producer tastings/”meet the maker” take place for 45 minutes at the beginning of each evening workshop
- Hold a “Limerick Food Producers on Tour” event for local producers to participate in markets and festivals in other counties
- Target producer participation in one national trade event per year e.g. Catex 2017
- Mini clusters within the overall food network should also be considered where areas of common interest are identified and a cluster approach to problem solving is beneficial

The objective of each event is to have a high profile keynote speaker who will be of interest to both the producer and buyer cohort thus insuring maximum attendance and networking opportunities

- Run an annual food showcase event (Bi-annual should be considered if the rate of new producers emerging is not significant)
  - Host an annual producer showcase event
  - Chefs and retail buyers, both local and national, should be invited
  - Product tasting showcase to be held
  - All producers to have professional tasting stands
  - Involvement of local distributors
  - Opening the event to the public should also be explored in year two, as this has been successful with the Cork Kerry Food Forum

- Create a local food producer directory
  - Objective is to list all food producers with the following contact details:
    - Contact person
    - Email
    - Phone
    - Website link
    - Facebook link
    - Twitter link
  - The target audience for the directory distribution is as follows:
    - All Limerick food retailers
    - Limerick foodservice operators
    - Workplace and other catering companies
    - Local media
  - It is recommended that a printed copy be created for year one but that an online directory be used after this
- The Limerick Milk Market should be considered as a venue for the food network activities where feasible



## 2. Improve business skillsets

High on the list of priorities from the stakeholders, who responded to the online research, was the need for upskilling and business improvement. For Limerick to excel in its food strategy it will need to ensure that all businesses have the opportunity to upskill.

Upskilling will take the form of information, communication and education from pre start-up through to advance stages of the food journey and supports should be made available to producers, foodservice operators, food tourism operators and food retailers.

The actions below should be implemented:

- Create a food information point

In order to improve communications within the food sector it is recommended that a dedicated single point of information is created and that information for Limerick food stakeholders be linked to this space. The actions are:

- To launch a Limerick Food website (possibly the same website as the food network) and associated digital food strategy aimed at providing information about upcoming events, grant assistance, food business support information from agencies within Limerick and at national level
  - Information from all related food agencies to be linked on this site
  - Clarity on where appropriate funding is available and what the eligibility criteria are should be provided
  - All training and support initiatives should be communicated through the food network and database
  - Improved interagency communication should be facilitated through this site
  - Greater integration of academic food supports and technical support available in Limerick should also be promoted through the site
- Develop a food education calendar

Fostering a well-educated and skilled food community will be an important element of this strategy which should be led and coordinated by The Local Enterprise Office. The actions required are as follows:

- A training needs analysis should be conducted to understand the needs of food producers and foodservice operators. This training needs analysis should inform the design of a three year education calendar for relevant stakeholders
- Topics which might be considered are:
  - Marketing a food business
  - Developing a food brand
  - Raising funds for a food business
  - Product and menu costing
  - Waste control
  - Developing sales
  - Profit improvement steps
  - Assisting producers achieve higher BRC accreditation
  - Distribution solutions
  - Linking food and tourism

- Care should be taken not to duplicate any programmes run at national level, and some of the solutions to needs identified as part of the training needs analysis may be provided through other national agencies e.g. Bord Bia, Teagasc etc.
  - Particular focus should be placed on the opportunity to educate and upskill Limerick food stakeholders on understanding the importance of creating a sustainable approach to their business and developing controls on waste etc., in order to boost their green credentials. Limerick has an active resource who would be willing to assist with this (South Region Waste Management Office). Appendix 3 sets out the supports available from this group
  - Producers should be upskilled on developing consumer direct retail models like on line trading, selling at farmers markets, developing box schemes, etc.
- Create a Centre of Food Excellence at LIT/UL
 

Limerick is fortunate to have a number of third level institutes focused on food. LIT has already strong food credentials in both product technical supports and through their Food and Tourism department. It is envisaged that LIT would act as a physical centre of food education and upskilling for Limerick. Actions to be considered:

    - Based on the training needs analysis above, LIT should review where it feels it can directly provide solutions by creating new programmes or harnessing existing ones focusing on the culinary and technical end, as the business upskilling will be provided by the LEO. It is envisaged that LIT and the LEO would work in partnership to develop complimentary programmes
    - Where possible all training for the food industry, run by third parties should use the LIT campus as a training venue so that it become synonymous with the education and upskilling of the food community
    - Technical training programmes such as chocolate making, craft beer production etc., for early stage producers should also be considered as part of an LIT training calendar to foster greater food entrepreneurship within Limerick
    - Any training needs identified by the food in tourism sub group above should also be considered by LIT in terms of possible solutions
    - UL also has credible food credentials and a clearly defined role for them also needs to be defined

- Explore the creation of a new micro food enterprise kitchen network
- Limerick has several incubation food facility spaces including the likes of St. Mary's AID who have two kitchens which they are willing the lease for short durations to early stage entrepreneurs. There is also a possible kitchen development in Kilfinnane and also Kilmallock. All of these available food facilities should be marketed as one entity even though they may be geographically spread. Care should be taken that no oversupply of kitchens is created. The following are recommended:
- An information brochure of all available food incubations space should be produced and circulated to all stakeholders. It should be also available for download on the Limerick food network site
  - 10 new food-focused enterprises should be encouraged to establish in Limerick by 2017 through leasing incentives or seed funding in these units
  - Strategically connect these enterprises together as a micro-foods enterprise cluster and link to food safety programmes, micro-business operators, alternative distribution programs, and skilled employment training activities
  - There are several new kitchen models operating in Ireland which should be reviewed as a possible new concept for Limerick e.g.
    - Ferbane Food Campus Co Offaly
    - Newmarket Kitchen, Bray, Co Wicklow

## Longer Term Considerations:

### 1. Tell the Limerick food story



Limerick is starting with a good foundation story to tell and this will be greatly strengthened over the coming three years. For the strategy to be successful it will be vital that all food stakeholders, and the public, understand what Limerick has to offer as a food city and county. The following actions should be considered:

- Develop a food brand and logo

While a Limerick food brand will be a visible image of Limerick’s food strategy, caution should be exercised that this logo should not be released for at least four months after the strategy launch to allow for substance to be developed. There is a danger of over promise and under deliver. The brand/logo should also be restricted to marketing activities and should not be used or seen as a quality stamp as the management systems associated with policing this would be over burdening. The following activities should be undertaken:

- An umbrella brand should be created as a marketing tool
  - It is envisaged that the core brand values will be:
    - Authentic food experiences
    - Inspiring food moments
    - Leading food innovation
    - Artisan skillsets
    - Food heritage and tradition
    - Clean and green
    - Genuine and personal
  - The use of the brand and logo should be licensed on an annual basis to third parties who use it
  - Third parties should be encouraged to use the brand and logo when marketing food events
  - A scheme should be considered which would encourage restaurants/cafes who stock more than 5 Limerick products to use the logo. A pilot project is taking place in Co Donegal on how a scheme like this can be managed
- Investigate setting up a food marketing campaign

It is envisaged that initial marketing activities will focus on promoting all current food activities and stories under one umbrella brand. This focus will change over time to incorporate new food stories and activities. Actions to include:

- The creation of a dedicated Limerick Food Facebook, Twitter, YouTube platforms etc.
- Dedicated Limerick food publications should be published twice per year similar to the West Fork initiative
- The use of allotments and linking consumes to initiative like the Urban Co-op should also be fostered

- A scheduled PR plan for foodservice operators and producers celebrating Limerick food should be developed (sometimes this PR plan will be about promoting individual businesses and other times it will be about celebrating the collective food community)
  - A retailer and foodservice affiliate programme to encourage operators to promote Limerick food on shelf and on menu should be developed
  - The recruitment of Limerick food ambassadors should commence. Limerick has many public personalities especially in the area of sport and where possible relationships can be formed with these personalities to act as ambassadors for Limerick food
  - Target the top Irish food and wine writers and facilitate showcasing Limerick product to them e.g. invite The Guild of Irish Food writers to hold one of their meetings in Limerick
  - Host food celebration events e.g. “New Castle West long table dinner”
  - Based on the recommendations of the food tourism action group (see page 29) create a separate marketing campaign for food projects focused on the tourist community e.g. food trails etc.
- Examine setting up a Limerick food “super festival”
- Limerick has many great festivals which are either dedicated to food or feature food as a partner event. Consideration should be given to enhancing the following:
- Launch a major annual food festival as a signature event for Limerick in partnership with existing key festivals.
  - Link all festival to the Limerick food brand and digital platform
  - While the food “super festival” will be the calendar highlight it will be vital that a calendar of food mini festivals and other food events span each weekend in May (starting with Riverfest) and June (centring on Culture and Chips) with the objective of extending the season and having a continuous “series” of food events rather than just one big event (there is an excellent food series model being operated by Boyne Valley Food Series which should operate as a benchmark <http://www.boynevalleyfoodseries.ie/>)
  - Limerick food producers could also be facilitated to exhibit at the many food shows and festivals within the city and county under an umbrella Limerick food brand. Some examples of shows which could be considered are

- Limerick Show Day
  - Cappamore Show Day
  - Culture and Chips
  - West Fest
  - Kilmallock Food Festival
  
- Consider delivering a school education programme
 

Educating younger consumers about Limerick’s great food story should be a part of the strategy so as to foster future converts. The school education programme should be developed to include:

  - A school education programme to be pitched at transition year classes
  - The target for year one is to be 5 schools
  - The school education programme should use the new Taste Council syllabus which is approved by the Department of Education
  - Producer and chef involvement will be integral to its success
  - This school programme should link to the PR strategy
  
- Explore creating a “food in tourism” action plan
 

It is recommended that a separate Limerick “food in tourism” sub group be considered, to develop an action plan focusing initially on the “easy wins”. The involvement of a Failte Ireland representative in this group is desirable. The objective of this group will be to focus on developing the food experience for the tourist visitor.

  - In various reports Failte Ireland recommend considering some of the following, and these should be explored for relevance in Limerick:
    - Start with a small group of like-minded local people in business who are committed to promoting food in tourism in the area and understand it will take time and practice to get it right.
    - Encourage local businesses to work together, cross promote products and create more cooperation in the local area and with other communities. Use food in tourism to link a wide diversity of food businesses and experiences
    - Continue to push for the use of more and more Irish products, traditional dishes and local specialities

- Be visitor ready at all times, have good marketing strategies in place, proper facilities, an area where you can offer hospitality where people can taste and engage with food and the food story.
- Create a personal touch; concentrate on the story the food and what Limerick has to offer. Highlight local producers more. All businesses should be an integral part of a food trail.
- Remember the importance of culinary tourism, connectivity with the food community and international dimension of food business.
- Food and drink needs to be the foundation of every destination, marketing and development strategy
- Recreate or take part in a similar event to “Restaurant Day” which is a food carnival that takes place worldwide four times a year. Local restaurants create pop up stalls for the day and the concept is based around food, social, culture and community
- Create unique experiences for visitors, tourists are always looking for something different to do and experiences they will remember. Bring into this Limericks culture and heritage offering a unique taste of the city and county
- Not only getting involved in social media, but the creation of an app to show what food is available locally and help visitors make the decision about where to eat. Tell stories, history, show menus, prices and directions. Can create a Limerick food app or have a small feature on an existing app.
- In addition dining is important. It is extremely important that food experiences are unique to that destination. Visitors are looking for food offerings that are largely affordable and offer a variety of options as opposed to dining options that offer high-end or exclusive dining. The availability of dining options utilising the unique produce of the area is important. This presents an opportunity to leverage Limerick’s unique food proposition as an entry for visitors to experience the destination.
- Tourists took warmly to the idea of visiting areas for a signature food and cultural event: this presents an opportunity for the creation of an event that can assist in changing perceptions of Limerick and put the city and county on the map from a tourism perspective.

- Raising awareness of key experiences can increase visitation. It is important to ensure however that these experiences deliver on visitor expectations in order to maximise positive word of mouth
- The joint Failte Ireland/BIM “Taste The Atlantic – A Seafood Journey” seafood trail project being trialled in Galway/Mayo should be explored for its relevance/ ability to adapt to Limerick
- Linkages to the Shannon College of Hotel Management should be explored.

While the above are simply general recommendations, each should be explored by the food in tourism sub group to help formulate an action plan to be put into place for the 2016 season.

## 2. Consider creating a physical food destination zone



Consideration should be given to develop one defined physical space which will act as a “go to food destination” for those interested in food. This zone should be consumer focused and contain food shops, cafés, street food vendors and markets. The following actions are to be considered:

- Investigate developing a street dining strategy for the zone
  - This zone should focus on Limerick city centre and a designated food area should be agreed.
  - Cafes and restaurants should be encouraged to locate tables on the street.
  - Enable sidewalk activation and vibrancy through food focused activity.
  - Link this street dining strategy to the food brand, digital strategy the annual food program.
  - Consider the creation of a safe late night street food zone in the heart of the area.
  - Through grant and investment programs, reduced rates etc., generate new ways to link food trucks and street activation into the business models of existing traders. Invite food trucks to locate within the zone (existing food businesses should be encouraged to also become street food vendors in order to boost their business). Food trucks are defined as modern food offers from artisan vendors. A bench mark can be established such as The Kerb Collective <http://www.kerbfood.com/>

- Consider investing in up to 20 adaptable street food carts for existing and new Limerick food traders to access on flexible lease arrangements. Use these street food carts to activate the street food zone. Link this activity to the food brand, digital strategy, and the annual food program.
- Consider incentivising entrepreneurs to locate within the food destination zone  
There are a number of excellent case studies which have seen regeneration of areas through the creation of food zones e.g. Brixton in London
  - As mentioned above creative incentives need to be put in place to stimulate new activity and to kick start interest from entrepreneurs in the food zone e.g. rent free periods for any properties owned by the city and county council, reduced rates time periods etc.



### 3. Enable the process

For the strategy to succeed, key enablers will need to be put in place, without which the strategy will almost certainly be destined to failure. While the enablers below can be implemented at any point on the food strategy journey, this report recommends that the appointment of the food strategy of the facilitator and the creation of the steering group should be done at the beginning. The following enablers should be considered:

- Formulate a communication plan for Limerick food strategy  
The first and most important step will be to ensure all stakeholders understand the strategy clearly so that each stakeholder group can organise their own events and activities while understanding the bigger picture and strategic direction. The actions arising are:
  - The strategy document to be circulated to all Limerick food stakeholders
  - The strategy document should be made available for download using a link on the Limerick City and County Council website

- The strategy document should be pushed out through different social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook etc.) by the Local Enterprise Office and Limerick City and County Council
  - A launch event to reveal the strategy should be organised
  - A briefing session should take place so that other agencies understand the content
  - A press release should be created about the strategy and local media representatives briefed
  - Subgroup briefings should take place for interest groups e.g. restaurant groups, retailer groups, festival organisers, agricultural representatives etc.
- Appoint a food strategy facilitator
    - A lead person within the Council/LEO should be empowered to lead the marketing and business development initiatives surrounding food business establishment and connectivity between existing producers, processors and associated organisations within Limerick. This person will be the council strategic driver responsible for the implementation of the strategy
    - A separate dedicated full time food strategy facilitator should be employed for a three year period to ensure that the strategy is fully implemented and maximised
    - The role of bodies such as “innovate Limerick” should be explored in terms of how they could facilitate some of the work streams in the strategy
- Create a steering group
    - A representative steering group should be created and this group should be tasked with guiding the strategic implementation and providing direction
    - This steering group should meet four times each year and appoint a chair person
    - The makeup of the steering group might comprise of some of the following:
      - A lead representative from Limerick City and County Council/LEO (as above)
      - The food strategy facilitator (as above)
      - A food producer representative

- A food tourism representative
  - A foodservice operator
  - A third level food education representative
  - Representatives from other agencies which interact with food in Limerick e.g. LEADER, Fáilte Ireland, Teagasc etc. should be invited to participate as required
  
- Implement the action list
  - An action list based on this strategy has been created on page 42. It has timelines associated with it and these should act as a road map for implementation which will be monitored by the steering group
  
- Provide adequate funding
  - While not every activity will require funding, there will be certain work streams which must be funded in order to enable them.
  - Sufficient funding sources will then need to be found. It is envisaged that funding will come from a multiplicity of agencies who will be tasked with the implementation of various activities
  - Discussions should take place with the local LEADER companies to understand what elements of the strategy can be funded under their criteria
  
- Foster interagency collaboration
  - The potential weakness of any strategy which involves multiple agencies in its execution, is that the agencies involved do not stick to the overall strategic direction and simply go off on “solo runs” outside of the vision of the strategy
  - For interagency collaboration to be maximised Limerick City and County/ Council/LEO will need to take a lead role in emphasising the vital nature of this collaboration, and also facilitating events which foster a singular food direction among all agencies involved

## Strategy Outcomes

It will be important that strategy outcomes are developed and project KPIs are put in place. There are six key outcomes which are shown in Figure 3 and are expanded over the following pages.

### LIMERICK FOOD STRATEGY 3 YEARS OUTCOMES

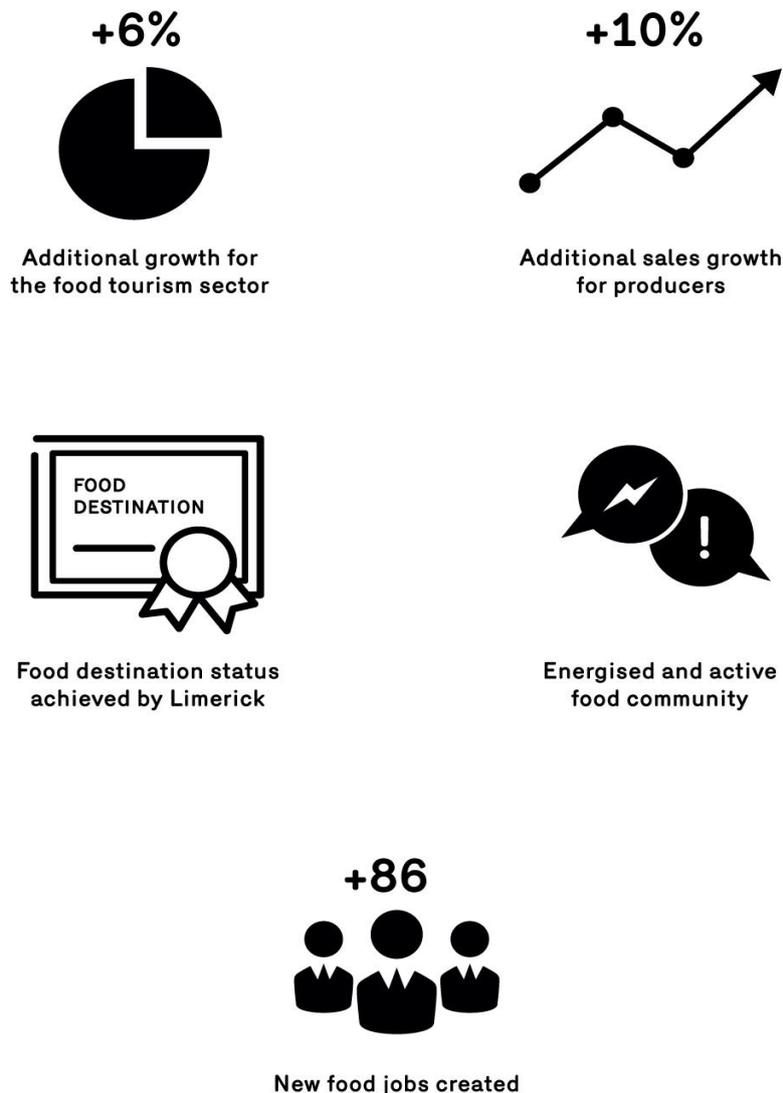


Figure 3: Limerick Food Strategy 3 Year Outcomes

**1. Additional growth for the food tourism sector**

- It is projected that the food tourism sector should be capable of generating an additional 6% growth if all of the recommendations set out by the food in tourism sub group are implemented. It is envisaged that KPI's for this will be under 2 headings
  - Bed nights
  - Visitor attraction numbers
- The 6% projected growth is over and above that which is currently being achieved by the sector

**2. Additional sales growth for producers**

- The strategy will be supporting producers in a significant way and 10% additional growth over and above what is currently being achieved is envisaged. The KPI for this is year on year sales growth

**3. New food jobs created**

- With a stronger focus on the food sector and new commercial activity, new jobs will be created over the three year period. It is projected that the 86 jobs will emerge from the following sources

<i>Job Source</i>	<i>New Jobs</i>
Existing food producers	15
New food producer start-ups	18
Cafés and restaurants	16
Food retailers	10
Support services e.g. food distribution	6
Agriculture	8
Food tourism venues	13

**4. Food destination status achieved by Limerick**

- While this outcome will be less easy to create KPIs for it is recommended that the following be monitored pre strategy implementation and for each of the three years
  - Comments on trip advisor

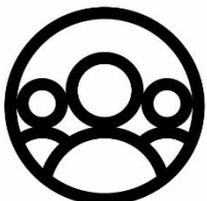
- Level of media coverage about Limerick food
- Level of social media comment about limerick food

## **5. Energised and active food community**

- Again this outcome is less tangible but certain measures will help to monitor it e.g.
  - Number of food stakeholders involved in running food events throughout the calendar
  - Numbers of food stakeholders attending the Limerick food network events
  - It would be advisable to conduct an annual satisfaction survey with the stakeholder group

## Action List

### Shorter Term Action List

Strategy	Action	Lead	To Commence
<b>Develop a United Food Community</b> 	• Create a food network (incl. website, etc.)	LEO	End Oct 2015
	• Develop a calendar of activity for network	LEO	End Oct 2015
	• Run a food showcase event	LEO	End May 2016
	• Create a local food producer directory (on line and print)	LEO	End Nov 2016
<b>Improve Business Skillsets</b> 	• Create a food information point (incl. on network website)	LEO	March 2016
	• Develop a food education calendar	LEO/LIT	March 2016
	• Create a centre of food excellence at LIT	LIT	March 2016

## Longer Term Considerations

Strategy	Action	Lead	To Begin
<b>Tell the Limerick Food Story</b> 	• Develop a food brand and logo	LEO TBC	Jan 2016
	• Investigate setting up a food marketing campaign	LEO TBC	Oct 2015
	• Examine setting up a Limerick food “Super Festival”	TBC	Jan 2016
	• Deliver a food education programme	LEO TBC	Oct 2015
	• Explore creating a food tourism action plan	Failte Ireland	TBC
<b>Create a Physical Food Destination Zone</b> 	• Develop a street dining strategy	LCCC	TBC
	• Create a food truck zone	LCCC	TBC
	• Incentivise entrepreneurs to locate within the food destination zone	LCCC	TBC
	• Create a micro-food enterprise zone	LCCC	TBC
<b>Enable the Process</b> 	• Formulate communication plan for Limerick food strategy	LEO	Oct 2015
	• Appoint a food strategy facilitator	LCCC	TBC
	• Create a steering group	LEO	Sept 2015
	• Develop an action list and funding sources	Complete	N/A
	• Foster interagency collaboration	LCCC	Sept 2015

## Appendices

**Appendix 1: Limerick Food Businesses (will be dropping in list of stakeholders here)**

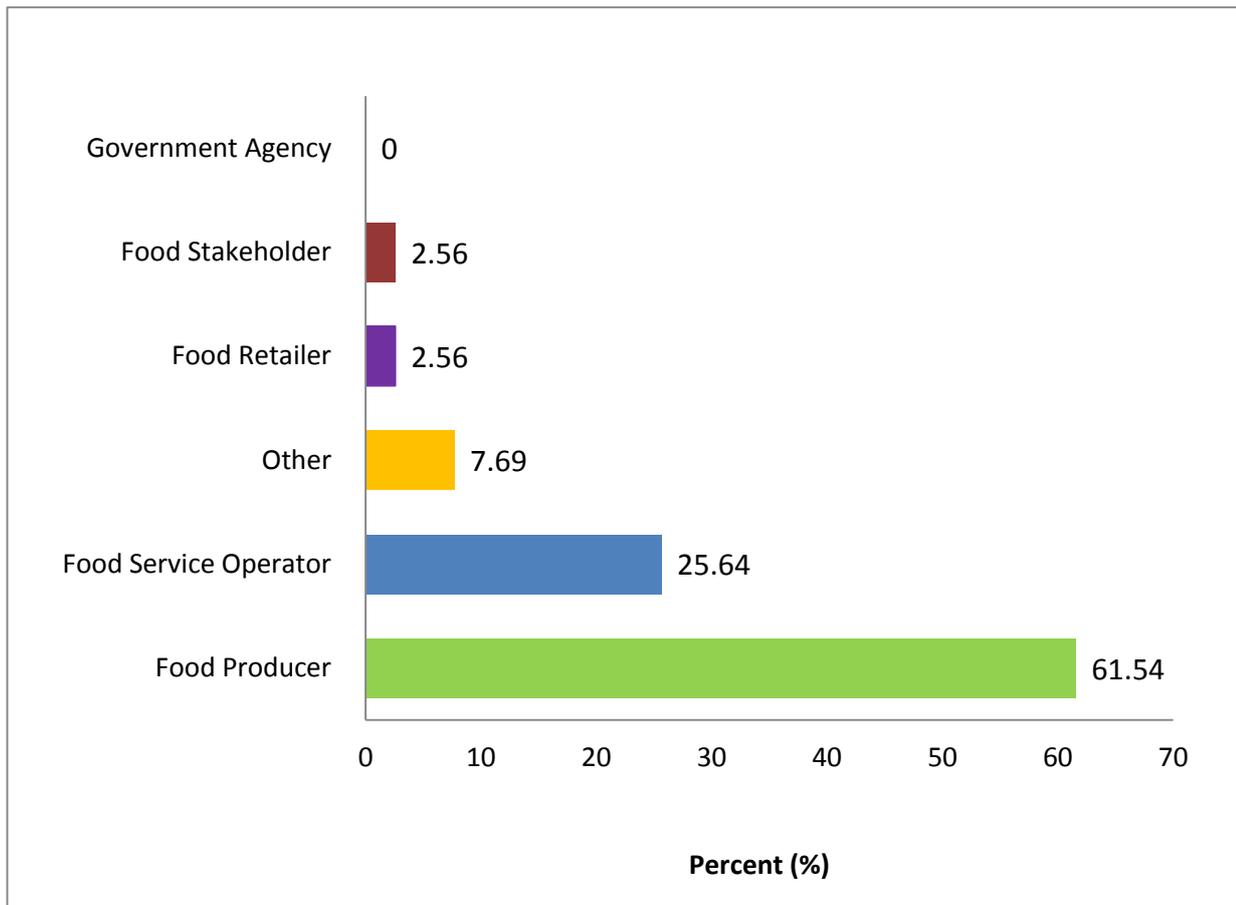
## **Appendix 2: Online Survey**

A Survey Monkey questionnaire was sent to 143 respondents. The purpose of this research was to validate the strategic direction and to get a greater understanding of the training needs and preferred supports required by food stakeholders. While the survey pool is small and can only be taken as indicative, its findings are consistent with the information gathered through the face to face interviews and focus groups. The key information gathered through the online research was as follows:

**Respondents:**

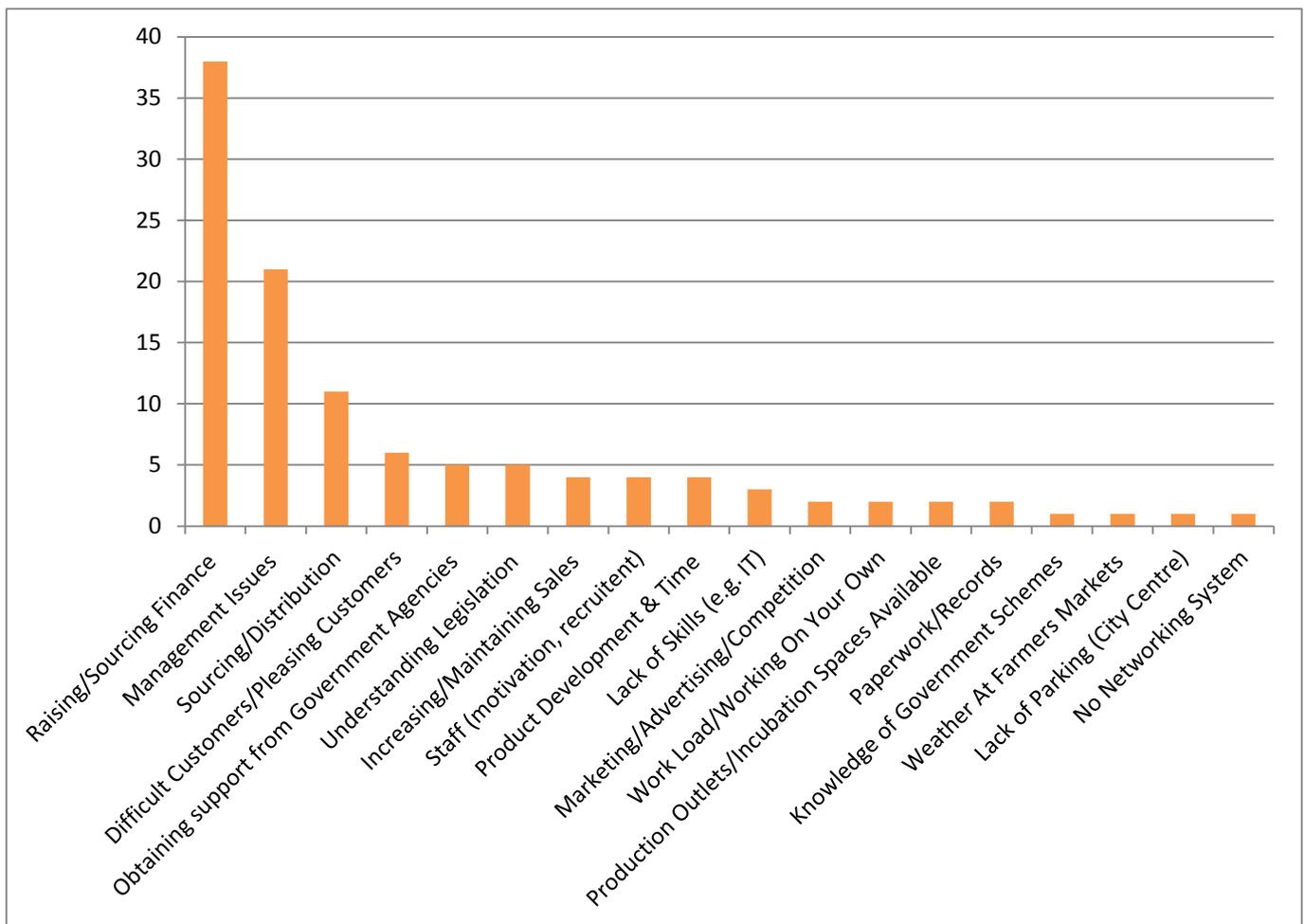
- 39 out of 143 people contacted responded
- These contacts were notified by email and text message
- The survey consisted of 10 questions
- The survey took approximately 6 minutes to complete
- Responses in questions 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 were prompted. All others are spontaneous

## Description of the Businesses Who Completed This Survey



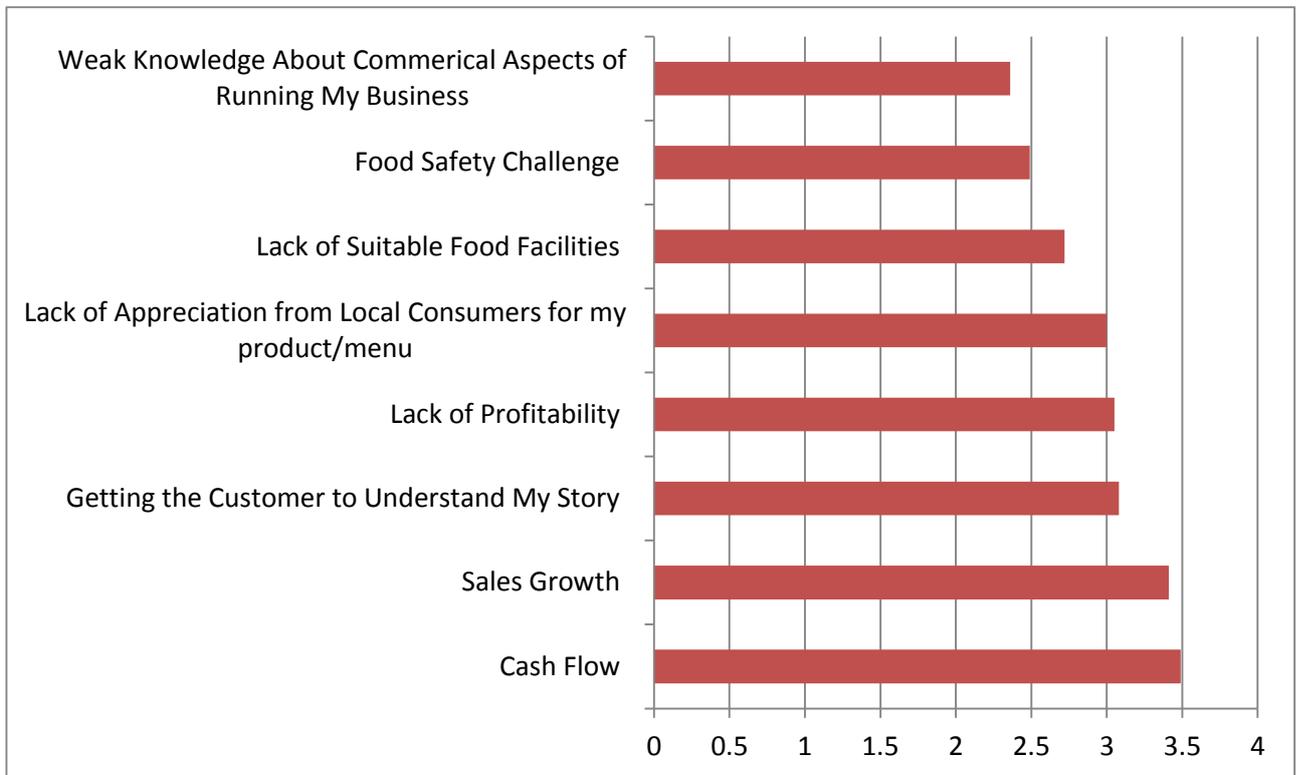
- The top two categories of food businesses involved in this survey were:
  - Food producers (61.54%)
  - Foodservice operators (cafés, restaurants etc., 25.64%)
- Others included:
  - A chilled foodservice distributor
  - A wholesaler
  - A professional service to the food and hospitality industry (7.69%)
- One food retailer and one food stakeholder answered this survey

### Top 3 Challenges for Limerick Food Businesses



- The top 3 challenges Limerick food business face centred around the following:
  - Finance: including raising and sourcing finance
  - Management issue: including time management, managing staff, delegating work
  - Sourcing and distribution: of ingredients, raw materials, finished products
- Pleasing customers, obtaining support from government agencies, understanding legislation and increasing/maintaining sales were also identified as major challenges
- Knowledge of government schemes, weather at farmers markets, lack of parking in the city centre and networking systems scored the lowest, with only one respondent identifying these as major challenges in their business

**Rating the Following Statements in Terms of How Big a Challenge They Are In the Business (1: Not a Challenge. 5: Major Challenge)**



- Sales growth and cash flow were the top 2 challenges identified by respondents
- Following closely behind were:
  - Getting the customers to understand my story
  - Lack of profitability
  - Lack of appreciation from local consumers for my product/menu
- All challenges scored between 2.36 – 3.49 so after tackling the top 2 challenges the rest should not be ignored

**Rating the Following Statements in Order of How They Represent Your Views (1: They Do Not Represent My Views at All. 5: They Represent Exactly My View)**



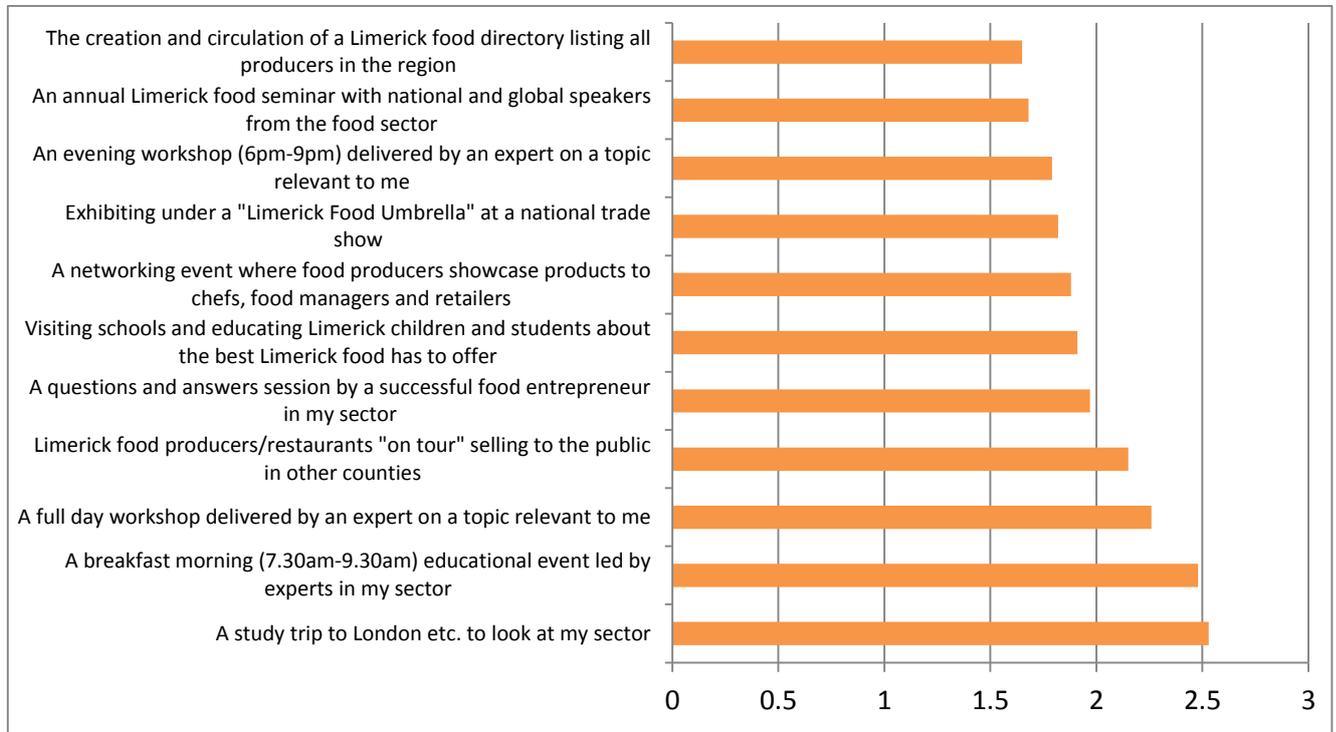
- Respondents believe strongly that “Limerick has a great food story to tell”. This statement scored the highest at 3.23 out of 5
- “As a city and county we are good at marketing out food credentials to the public” scored the lowest, meaning this needs to be addressed
- However all scores were similar so none of the above should be ignored

### Items This Strategy Should Tackle First (In Order of Importance)

1	The development of a strong food marketing campaign to promote the best of Limerick food
2	The formation of a Limerick food network
3	The communication of a clear food strategy to all stakeholders
4	The running of food showcase events for trade buyers to meet food producers annually
5	The creation and promotion of a food brand/logo
6	The running of a consumer showcase event annually
7	The creation of a Limerick "Super Food Festival" to compliment other existing festivals
8	To showcase local foods at national events (e.g. The Taste of Dublin, The Ploughing Championships)

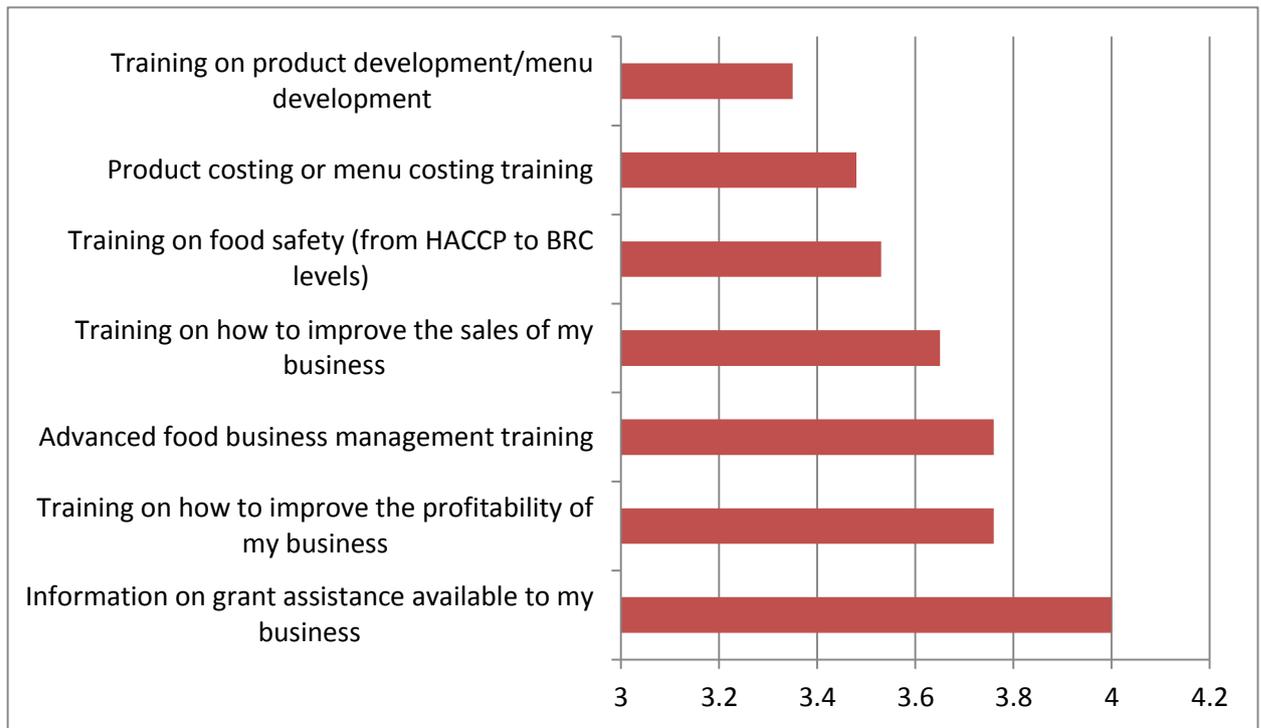
- The top 3 items identified as most important that should be tackled first are:
  - The development of a strong food marketing campaign to promote the best of Limerick food (this recommendation is addressed on page
  - The formation of a Limerick food network
  - The communication of a clear food strategy to all stakeholders.

**The Likelihood of Attending/Utilising the Following Events and Ideas (1: Very Interested. 5: Not Interested)**



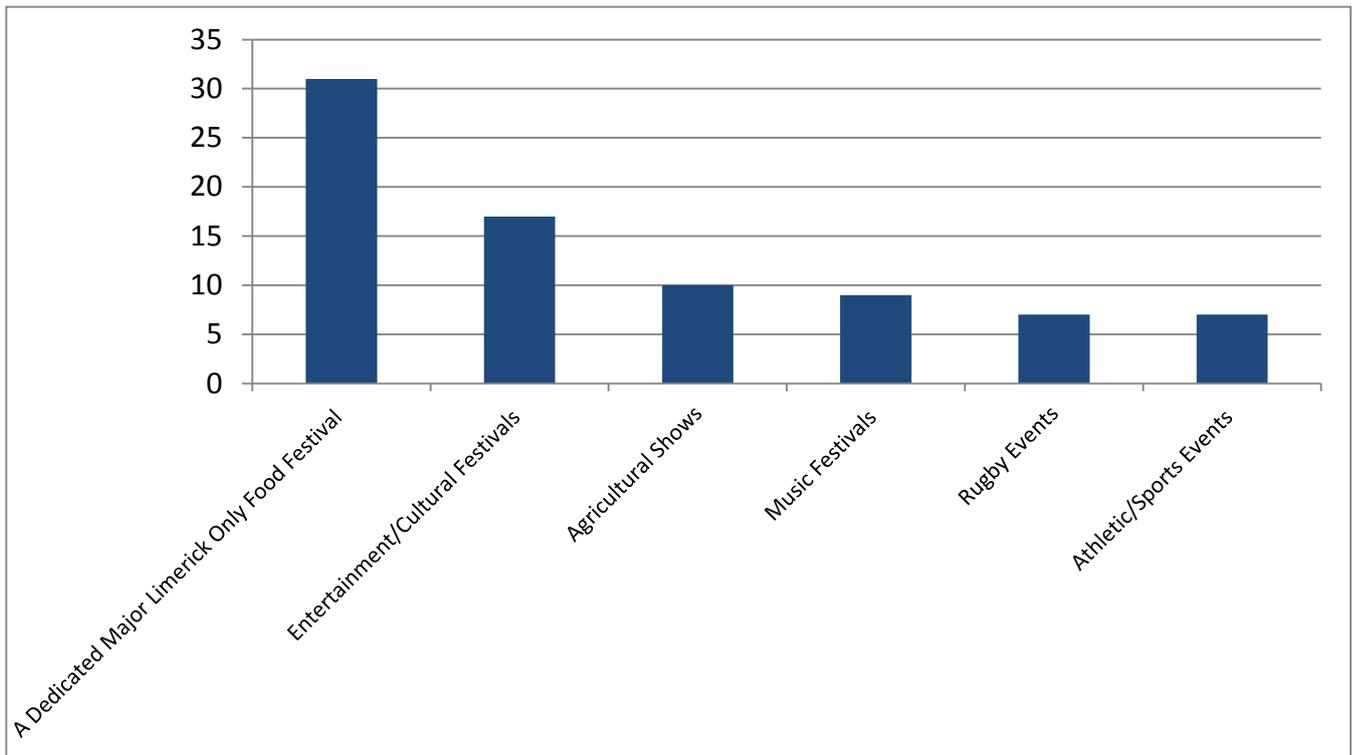
- The most popular events and ideas included:
  - The creation and circulation of a Limerick food directory listing all producers in Limerick
  - An annual Limerick food seminar with national and global speakers from the food sector
- The least popular ideas and events included:
  - The breakfast morning
  - A study trip to London for example.
- The remaining ideas and events, however, scored very similarly and all should be considered at different times over the course of this strategy

**Most Beneficial Support Options to Your Business (1: Not Relevant To the Business. 5: Highly Beneficial To the Business)**



- Information on grant assistance was identified as the most beneficial support needed by businesses
- Training to improve profitability of the business and advanced food management training also scored high, and identified as very important to the businesses
- Training on product and menu development scored as the least beneficial support option for the businesses

## What Events and Festivals Would You like Limerick Food to be involved with



- Businesses would like to see a dedicated major Limerick only food festival
- Entertainment and cultural festivals scored 2<sup>nd</sup> highest for limerick food to be involved with
- The lowest scoring options were rugby and athletic/sports events

### **Suggested Names for the Limerick Food Strategy:**

- Participants were asked to suggest a suitable name for the Limerick Food Strategy
- This question was spontaneous
- “Limerick Food” was suggested several times by respondents
- Other popular suggestions included:
  - A Taste of the West
  - Smart Food
  - Bia As Luimneach
  - Food, The Limerick Way
  - The Taste of Limerick
  - Love Limerick Food
  - Limerick Food Alliance
  - Limerick, Love Local
  - Taste of Thomond
  - Taste of Treaty

### **What Do You Want This strategy To Achieve:**

Respondents were asked, in their own words, what they wanted this strategy to achieve. The main points identified included:

- Better brand identity of Limerick and the food it offers
- Better relationships and awareness between producers and buyers
- Better networking for producers
- Greater awareness of Limerick food
- Promotion of Limerick and food
- Support from the government and banks

### Appendix 3: Research

#### Background information

Limerick accounts for just over four per cent of the Irish population. The populations of Limerick and the population of Ireland, according to the 2011 Census are shown in table 1.

**Table 1:** Population of Limerick 2011 (percentage of total population in brackets)

Limerick City	57,106 (1.2)
Limerick County	134,703 (2.9)
Total	191,809 (4.2)
Ireland	4,588,252

Source: CSO

The number of food producers, (not including farms) in the Limerick in 2015, by type, (WIP) are shown in Table 2. **This will be completed when the producer list above is finished**

**Table 2:** Food producers in Limerick classified by stage of production.

Category	Number
Start-ups	xx
Early to mid-stage producers	xx
Established food producers	xx
'Large scale'	xx

Source: xxxxxxxxxxxx

On the basis of these statistics, the number of food producers in Limerick is proportionately considerably less than in Co Cork, a county where the organisation of small food producers could be considered as more developed. The ratio in Limerick is one food producer per 3,800 of population compared to Cork City and County where it is one per 1,800.

## **Initiatives to increase the number of sustainable small-scale food businesses**

Initiatives that have worked in Ireland and overseas are set out below and are presented under a number of themes.

### **1. Directories of stakeholders**

#### **Food producers**

In Ireland, good examples of producer directories for counties or areas are the Cork Food Finder (<http://www.tastecork.com/downloads/CorkFoodFinderDirectory.pdf>), and the Westmeath Food Network which is an on-line producer website and directory, ([www.westmeathfood.ie](http://www.westmeathfood.ie)).

An example from Northern Ireland is the website and directory ([www.naturallynorthcoast.com/local-produce-directory/](http://www.naturallynorthcoast.com/local-produce-directory/)).

On-line producer directories have the advantage that they can be updated on a continuing basis and provide an up-to-the minute communications channel between customers and producers. Categories included in [naturallynorthcoast.com](http://www.naturallynorthcoast.com) are: bakery products and confectionery, country markets and farm shops: dairy products and eggs; delicatessen, chutneys, jams, preserves; drinks; fish, shellfish; fruit, vegetables, herbs, meat producers and butchers.

A good international example of a directory of artisan food producers is the Canadian province funded website: [www.sustainontario.com](http://www.sustainontario.com).

#### **Distributors**

Finding a distributor can be a major factor in deciding the success of a new food producer. Directories of distributors for small food producers in Ireland include the Bord Bia database of distributors,

([www.bordbia.ie/industry/manufacturers/GrowingYourBusiness/DistributorSearch/Pages](http://www.bordbia.ie/industry/manufacturers/GrowingYourBusiness/DistributorSearch/Pages))

and the Bord Bia Foodservice Market Directory. This lists buyers in the foodservice sector plus distributors who serve this sector.

([www.bordbia.ie/industry/manufacturers/insight/publications/bbreports/FoodserviceReports/](http://www.bordbia.ie/industry/manufacturers/insight/publications/bbreports/FoodserviceReports/))

These and other on line national resources should be used as reference points when upskilling Limerick producers.

## **Local markets**

Local and ‘farmers’ markets are an important outlet for micro food producers. A directory of farmers markets is available from Bord Bia

([www.bordbia.ie/consumer/aboutfood/farmersmarkets/pages/](http://www.bordbia.ie/consumer/aboutfood/farmersmarkets/pages/)).

## **Food Tourism**

Local and overseas visitors to an area increasingly want to ‘experience’ a place rather than ‘look at’ it. Food tourism, by combining a local food experience with a visit satisfies this requirement. For micro producers, food tourism ensures that local produce has an automatic advantage over produce from outside the county. Directories of food tourism experiences are not readily available for Limerick, should be considered.

## **2. Producer education, upskilling and training**

This allows producers to increase the efficiency with which they use the resources which they already possess, including their own ‘human capital’.

Relevant initiatives in Ireland include:

- The Food Academy. This is a combined training programme of Bord Bia, Supervalu and Local Enterprise Offices aimed at supporting and nurturing start-up food businesses. The aim is to provide a consistent level of food marketing knowledge to new and early-stage food business owners. There are two stages – ‘Start’ and ‘Advanced’. The Supervalu website gives a good summary of the programme and details of how to apply. ([www.supervalu.ie/real-people/food-academy-programme](http://www.supervalu.ie/real-people/food-academy-programme)).
- In addition to the above The Limerick Local Enterprise Office have also strengthened their supports for early stage food businesses with the introduction of a new programme “start your own food business” which 18 producers have already participated in with a further group to participate before the end of 2015
- The Limerick Institute of Technology, (LIT) in its link with the Local Enterprise Office at the Hartnett Enterprise Acceleration Centre operates the New Frontiers Entrepreneur Development Programme. ‘Phase 1’ of this programme offers “free training and business advice to potential entrepreneurs to assist them in developing their business ideas into tangible business plans”. ([www.hartnettcentre.ie/programmes](http://www.hartnettcentre.ie/programmes))

- The Food Hub, in Drumshanbo, Co Leitrim offers education and training courses in food business related activities that are geared to small producers. Example courses include: Start Your Own Food Business, Labelling, Food Safety and Hygiene and HACCP, Branding and Packaging and New Product Development Programme. ([www.thefoodhub.com](http://www.thefoodhub.com)).
- Teagasc, the Agriculture and Food Development Authority provides a range of training courses for small food businesses, primarily geared to food enterprises linked to farming, such as the production of further processed dairy products. ([www.teagasc.ie/ruraldev/](http://www.teagasc.ie/ruraldev/))
- The Dublin Food Chain is a joint initiative for small firms in the food sector. It is financed and run by the four Dublin local authorities and provides workshops, conferences and tasting sessions for small scale food producers.

### 3. Formation of a producer or food group

Initiatives to foster the growth of micro food producers will need the strength of a group approach. By definition, micro food producers will be too small to make significant advances on their own.

A first step should be the formation of a group of like-minded food producers.

Examples in Ireland include:

- Taste Cork, ([www.tastecork.com](http://www.tastecork.com))
- Tipperary Food Producers, ([www.tipperaryfoodproducers.com](http://www.tipperaryfoodproducers.com))
- Westmeath Food Network, ([www.westmeathfood.ie](http://www.westmeathfood.ie))
- The Dublin Food Chain, ([www.dublinfoodchain.ie](http://www.dublinfoodchain.ie)).

In Scotland, examples are the Ayrshire Food Network (established 2002), ([www.ayrshirefoodnetwork.co.uk](http://www.ayrshirefoodnetwork.co.uk)). An extensive list of food networks in Scotland is available on the website of Experiencing Scotland, (motto ‘Driving Business through Provenance’). ([www.experiencingscotland.com](http://www.experiencingscotland.com)). An example of a local producer group focussing on small producers is ‘Taste Cumbria’ food and drink, based in the UK Lake District. ([www.tastecumbria.com](http://www.tastecumbria.com)).

### **Case Study of “Taste Cumbria” UK.**

Taste Cumbria was set up after “devastating floods” in 2009. The aim was to capitalise on the areas wide range of food and drink and to help regenerate the area. Taste Cumbria works as a “not for profit! Organisation and any profits are re-invested into events, festivals and supporting local producers.

Farms, producers, pubs, cafés, restaurants, hotels and attractions are all linked in to “Taste Cumbria”. Events for the public include food festival sand shows. The group aims to hold events especially for food business. These events include trade shows, farmers markets, and educational events such as conferences as well as “free resources” for members of the group. The group has eleven “Ambassadors” who are all members of the group.

## Food Cluster

It has been found in some cases that the clustering together of small food producers in a management skills and education. Formation of a cluster can be an expensive process so it may not be worthwhile doing it an early stage of the food strategy. A well-known example in Europe is the food cluster in upper Austria, ([www.lebensmittelcluster.at](http://www.lebensmittelcluster.at)).

In Ireland, the Ballyhoura Food Sector Development Strategy suggests a cluster business model for the area. (<http://www.ballyhouradevelopment.com/wp->)

The advantages of a cluster are set out as:

- Increased Productivity
- Faster Innovation
- New Business Formation
- Attract National & International Players to Limerick

#### 4. Education of consumers

- Initiatives that educate students, particularly ‘second level’ students about locally produced and artisan foods are quite common.
- Examples include:
  - The ‘Tipperary Food Connect’ project in Ireland (<http://clonmelonline.com/2010/10/tipperary-food-producers-food-connect-programme/>).
  - The ‘Alex Artisans’ initiative run by Alexandra College in Dublin. ([www.rte.ie/lifestyle/food/best-of-irish/321193/](http://www.rte.ie/lifestyle/food/best-of-irish/321193/)).
  - The transition year food education programme developed by the TASTE Council <http://www.tastecouncilofireland.com/schools-ty-unit.htm>
  - There are many examples in the USA funded by the Farm to School Grant Program supported by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). (<http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmentoschool/farm-school-grant-program>).
- Organised visits to farms and food producers also form part of consumer education. If micro food producers are organised as a group, visits need only take place occasionally to each producer but added together they form a regular programme.
  - The visits can be

- School visits
- Visits open to all (but must be pre-arranged)
- Visits as part of food tourism

## **Education of Consumers**

### **Case Study of Tipperary Food Producers Food Connect Programme**

Tipperary Food Producers is a group of county based artisan producers. The group combined with twelve schools in the county to run an innovative education programme. The objective was to link students from the schools and local food producers. Four students from Transition Year in the School spend up to one month working with a local food producer. The objective is for them to learn about the business and local food production. Fellow students in the class have the opportunity to run a real commercial project, such as marketing research, on behalf of the food producer. One of the schools taking part in the initiative was Our Lady's Secondary School, Templemore. Transition Year students in the school had a competition to choose the four who would be working directly with the company, the Tipperary Cheese Company. The company uses its own livestock to make a variety of dairy products. The four students placed with the company "were involved in the cheese and yoghurt production, doing bacteria tests in the laboratory as well as helping out on the farm and in the office". After observing the company, the whole class had to complete and present a SWOT analysis of the company, which was an entry in an independently judged competition. According to the school website, ([www.ourladystemplemore.ie](http://www.ourladystemplemore.ie)), "the students really enjoyed and learnt from the experience."

## Retail promotions

The promotion can be for the product of a single producer but should also be under the banner of the local food group. Many regions in Ireland and internationally are using retail promotions to boost the profile of local producers.

- Retail promotions at one or a chain of outlets can be as simple or extensive as resources allow. A simple stand with a sample of produce and a story of the provenance can be very effective. A good example in Ireland is Ardkeen Quality Foodstore in Co. Waterford, ([www.ardkeen.com](http://www.ardkeen.com)).
- Tastings of local produce are another tried and tested approach.
- Provenance is a key feature of the promotion of locally produced foods. Bord Bia research conducted in 2011 suggested that three factors that consumers looked for most when making a decision on what producers products to buy were: “who produced it”; “where did they come from” and “what is the story behind the product”. This information must feature strongly in all parts of the marketing strategy for micro food producers in Limerick
- A promotional tool for this is to produce a map of ‘The Story of Food in Our City and County’. It can be presented in participating outlets and would add to brand awareness.
- The provenance story can be strengthened by connecting customers, both retail and intermediate, with primary producers such as farmers and fishermen.
  - Point of sale material giving details of the primary producer(s) involved in the production of the product, such as the name and location of dairy farmers who provide the milk for dairy products such as cheese and yogurt.

## Connecting with primary producers

- Connecting with primary producers also provides a link with food tourism. An Irish example of an initiative to link customers to producers is the ‘Donegans Farm Walk and Angus Steak Dinner’, which is part of the ‘Boyne Valley Food Series’ of Food Tourism events.  
([www.boynevalleyfoodseries.ie/events/donegans-farm-walk-angus-steak-dinner/](http://www.boynevalleyfoodseries.ie/events/donegans-farm-walk-angus-steak-dinner/)).

Another good Irish example is Ballycross Apple Farm in Co Wexford. ([www.ballycross.com](http://www.ballycross.com)). The farm provides tours of the orchard as well as a farm shop and seasonal family events.

- An example from overseas is the state of Vermont in the USA, ([www.vtattractions.org](http://www.vtattractions.org)), where a series of farm visits form part of the food tourism package for locals and visitors alike.

## Farmers markets

- Farmers markets have at least three key functions for a local food group.
- They are sufficiently small and local to allow micro food producers to participate.
- They allow primary producers of fruit and vegetables to sell locally at retail level and interact with customers.
- They give local customers a chance to see and sample the local food offerings.
- They can provide a destination or a point of interest for food tourism.

## **Food Tourism**

Food tourism refers to making food an integral part of the experience of a visitor to an area or attraction. The range of possibilities for micro-food producers is almost limitless. A huge range has been tried in Ireland and overseas. They include:

- **County based food events**

A good example of local food tourism based on a county or local area Boyne Valley Food Series, ([www.boynevalleyfoodseries.com](http://www.boynevalleyfoodseries.com)). Examples of the events organised by participating producers, restaurants, hotels and retailers are:

- A farm walk followed by Angus Steak Dinner
- ‘Outdoor Feast of Local Produce’
- Festival of Irish Food, (including local artisan produce)
- Family Food Festival, (held in the garden of a hotel)

Another Irish example is West Cork Foods, ([www.westcorkfoods.ie](http://www.westcorkfoods.ie)) where food experiences and visiting producers feature strongly as promotional methods for locally produced artisan foods.

## Food Tourism and the Local Food Sector

### Case Study of Boyne Valley Food Series

The Boyne Valley Food Series is a food tourism initiative driven by local farmers, food producers, retailers, hotels and restaurants. The idea is for local food and visitor attractions and events to promote both the food and tourism sectors of the local economy. The ‘food series’ started as county based food tourism venture but expanded in 2014 to a regional event. This allowed greater sharing of the promotion of the Boyne Valley and an existing tourism strategy. The area had a rich and well known cultural heritage including the Newgrange Neolithic site, the site of the Battle of the Boyne and Slane Castle.

The food series consists of a series of “stand alone yet related events with food at the centre of everything”. Individual businesses, which can be primary producers such as farmers, food producers such as artisan bakeries, restaurants, hotels, retailers and ‘farmers markets’ must commit to hosting and promoting at least one food related event in the year. This spreads the burden among many firms and makes the process financially and logistically feasible for small local firms. Commitment is a key feature.

Example events include food festivals, a craft beer festival, children’s’ cookery camps, a ‘Dawn Chorus and Artisan Breakfast’ and a traditional garden fete. The possibilities are limited only by the imaginations of the participants.

## Appendix 4: Sustainable Practices

Like all businesses, it is important for the food sector to apply the principles of sustainability to their own process and their role in the supply chain, whether as purchaser, producer or distributor/retailer. This includes efficient use of materials and packaging, water and energy (including transport). As well as environmental benefits, there are potential cost savings to be gained. Furthermore, as clients and consumers increasingly seek green credentials in their purchases, the enterprise with enhanced sustainability is at a distinct advantage.

Food waste prevention in particular can be implemented through smart purchasing and efficient control of food stocks, while portion control is also a key factor for the hospitality sector. Staff at the Southern Region Waste Management Office (SRWMO) which is based in Limerick, as well as Limerick City & County Council's Environmental Awareness Officer, are available to provide advice on improving resource efficiency and avoiding waste. Practical assistance is available to help individual businesses measure wastes generated, so that continuous improvement can be achieved.

SRWMO contact details are Tel 061 496596, email [info@srwmo.ie](mailto:info@srwmo.ie)

Web: [www.southernwasteregion.ie](http://www.southernwasteregion.ie)

The Environmental Awareness Officer may be contacted through [customerservice@limerick.ie](mailto:customerservice@limerick.ie), Tel 061 496200

There are also national initiatives which focus on sustainability and resource efficiency. Information on advice and supports can be obtained on their websites:

*Green Business*      [www.greenbusiness.ie](http://www.greenbusiness.ie)

*Origin Green*      [www.origingreen.ie](http://www.origingreen.ie)

*Stop Food Waste*      [www.stopfoodwaste.ie](http://www.stopfoodwaste.ie)

*Cré Association*      [www.cre.ie](http://www.cre.ie)

*Brown Bin promotion*      [www.brownbins.ie](http://www.brownbins.ie)

*Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland*      [www.seai.ie](http://www.seai.ie)