

Producers across South East to benefit from London markets project



Links between small producers in and around London and foodservice buyers at wholesale markets such as New Covent Garden Market (NCGM) are to be bolstered by a £1.5m project funded by the London Development Agency.

The three-year scheme, which aims to increase the amount of locally sourced food served in the Capital by 15%, kicked off at the beginning of February with a trade fair and meet-the-buyer event at NCGM, organised by the South East Food Group Partnership, Taste of Anglia and London Food Link (part of Sustain), among others.

Around 70 catering distributors are based at NCGM and they are increasingly interested in sourcing local produce, as well as a wide range of products such as cheese, charcuterie, ice cream, drinks and baked goods, said Henriette Reinders, director of the South East Food Group Partnership.

"Wholesalers at NCGM supply everyone from the very top restaurants to small cafés, as well as public institutions. There is a growing demand for local and organic food in these areas," she said.

A full-time business development manager, Tom Beeston, has been appointed at the market to help forge closer links between producers and wholesalers. He will also quantify the demand for South East products in the capital, establish links with local schools and explore the potential for a South East products area at the market.

According to Reinders, once up and running, the scheme will be rolled out to other wholesale markets in London, including Billingsgate and Smithfield.

The project is part of Mayor Ken Livingstone's food strategy for the Capital, which was published in September and aims to develop a healthy and sustainable food infrastructure. Producers who attended the NCGM event included High Weald Dairy, Pratt's rapeseed oil and Pollen Organic pesto.

Caribbean producer plans expansion

A Luton-based producer of Caribbean foods will soon be selling her range through retailers for the first time.

Carol Stephenson, founder of Caribbean Flava, recently gained Food Standards Agency approval of her meat products plant, enabling her to sell through third parties. Until now, her products have only been available direct to the shopper at farmers markets and online.

Stephenson is hoping to grow her business by selling through delis and supplying hotels and bakeries with her patties.

The production team at Caribbean Flava comprises just five part-time staff, including Stephenson's mother, who provided the knowledge and inspiration for many of the recipes. "The food is quite labour-intensive to make and with all the prepping, cooking and packing the team have to be involved in all aspects of the production," says Stephenson.

"So far the reaction to our products at farmers' markets has been good. Most people think the food will be too spicy for them, but once they try it they say the flavour is milder than they expected."

Bigger brands have done an important job in driving the awareness of Caribbean foods in the UK, according to Stephenson, but she is concerned that when recipes are adapted too much for the British palate they can lose their originality. She also hopes Caribbean Flava can bring lesser-known dishes to the market. "Rice and peas, saltfish ackee and jerk chicken are popular dishes but there is a lot more people are yet to try, such as chicken in run-down sauce [reduced coconut] and Trinidad chicken, a sort of everyday stew."

Manchester-based Afro-Caribbean sauce company Odeiga House, meanwhile, has recently adopted new-look packaging to promote its Naija sauce range. "Many key [Caribbean food] operators look like a horrific throwback to the 1970s," said a spokesperson. "Naija has worked with its key retailers to premiumise the look of the product so they are on the same footing as sauces like Lloyd Grossman and Sacla."



After targeting shops in the West Midlands region like Whitbourne Village Shop (pictured), HEFF is hoping to encourage more retailers from outside the area to stock Heart of England products.

HEFF declares national ambitions for Savour the Flavour scheme

Heart of England Fine Foods (HEFF) is hoping to go national with its Savour the Flavour scheme, designed to get West Midlands products on the shelves of more small stores. In December, the group opened up the scheme to shops outside the Midlands, enabling them to benefit from Heart of England branded display equipment in return for stocking a range of lines from HEFF's region.

The first retailer to sign up was Shepherd's Farm Shop,

near Newent in Gloucestershire, which borders the region covered by HEFF. The shop – which already focuses on local foods – agreed to stock more produce from Herefordshire and Worcestershire and was rewarded with a multi-deck chiller and a mini freezer.

At present, 62 food and drink producers across the Midlands have signed up to the scheme, which works in partnership with Heart Distribution to deliver products in multi-temperature, HEFF branded vehicles.

"It is not a wholesale operation, more a fast and efficient distribution channel solely for our producers," says HEFF business development manager Louise Pickford. "They retain control over where their products are sold and at what price."

By HEIDI RUGE



Caribbean Flava hope to sell patties to hotels, bakeries and delicatessens