



Sharon Seddon (far right) promotes 'PukkaStuff' scheme

Local food for thought

Sharon Seddon, Schools Catering Manager at North Lincolnshire Council, explains how sourcing school meals ingredients closer to home is helping the economy, environment and pupils' health

When I came into my job at North Lincolnshire three years ago, I was delighted to see cooks still peeling potatoes and a variety of other fresh produce being used for school meals.

But I was surprised to see that beef from Brazil and chicken from Thailand were on the menu and only 10% of ingredients were sourced in regionally from Yorkshire and Humber or from

neighbouring authorities. As our area is predominantly rural, it made sense to put local food onto the plates of local children.

Elected members and colleagues in my department and others have been highly supportive in getting locally sourced ingredients onto the school menu and we have now managed to get this figure up to 31%. This is not only having a positive impact on pupils' understanding of healthy eating and sustainability, it is also boosting the local

economy and cutting down on the environmental impact of transporting food needlessly.

Food expenditure is approximately £1.3 million per year, so sourcing 31% locally has a value of £341,000, meaning an extra £231,000 per year being spent in the Yorkshire and Humber and neighbouring authorities. Research by APSE and CLES has showed that every £1 a council spends generates an extra 64 pence in the local economy when supply chains are taken into

consideration. Stopping nearly a quarter of a million pounds leaking out of the regional economy therefore has a huge knock-on effect, as local businesses and their employees have more to spend on other products and services.

Not only does procuring locally mean more money stays in the local economy, encouraging uptake of school meals keeps catering staff in jobs. So using more local food went hand in hand with our campaign to increase uptake. Uptake has risen by 6% in the past two years back to its 2006 level - following a steep decline that was reflected nationally.

My authority approached the Government Office for Yorkshire and Humber and we were fortunate to be awarded funding for some in-depth market research, which included publicity around healthy eating. We found that pupils in primary schools understood healthy eating and sustainability, as did secondary school children. The latter were, however, less likely to put their knowledge into practice. Feedback showed us that they would respond to a reward scheme. So our 'PukkaStuff' scheme, which won the LACA marketing award for excellence last year, was introduced. The campaign involved taking up messages that children were coming up with themselves and we use the fact that the

food is local as a key message in our publicity material.

"In terms of procurement, we ensured that our desire to purchase regionally is in line with European Union tendering regulations. We asked each meat supplier to provide quotes for three categories of supply; UK and other; purely UK and purely Yorkshire and Humber. This enabled us to weigh up what offered the best value overall".

After a tendering exercise, Young's in Sheffield, whose managing director had a firm policy of using regional produce, won the tender."

Our fruit and vegetable supply was still under contract so we worked with the

existing supplier closely to source more produce from Yorkshire and Humber, Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire. We are attempting to source more produce closer to home. We are proud to have exceeded our target of 30% and now source 31% of school meal ingredients regionally. We are working hard on the remaining 69% to bring more regional food onto our menu.

Part of the tendering process entails a desire to reduce food miles and examination of the environmental policies of our suppliers. We need to measure both cost and added value and local food is not always the cheapest. As resources are limited, we need to balance cost and other benefits. Some health, economic and environmental benefits are cost neutral but others require careful consideration.

We have had positive feedback on sourcing ingredients locally. Parents have more confidence in school food when it is locally produced and children can identify where food comes from making the link between food, health and the environment. Headteachers and governors report that they are very happy with the quality of the food and the service in schools.

We will continue to build up our local supply of food as it has health, sustainability and economic benefits.

Contact: sharon.seddon@northlincs.gov.uk



North Lincolnshire dining facility