



The contribution of local food cultures to rural development

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Interdisciplinary project:

‘Comparative Assessment of Environmental, Community and Nutritional Impacts of Consuming Fruit and Vegetables Produced Locally and Overseas’



Co-sponsored by DEFRA and SEERAD

Aims and Objectives

- Soil science (greenhouse gases)
- Life cycle assessment (inputs/outputs, energy tariff)
- Chemical analysis (nutritional content)
- Health impact and consumer preferences (survey data)
- Local food cultures (qualitative analysis)

The meaning of local food cultures

“Distinctive local products, dishes, diets, food practices and distribution channels”

Despite some scepticism we recognize the existence of differences at:

National level (France, Italy, Scandinavia)

Regional level (Normandy, Provence, Alsace)

Local level

In the case of the British Isles there are broad distinctions between
England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland
Regional Specialties
Local hotspots

Propositions about local food cultures

- Not all areas have a local food culture
- Not all areas have an equal set of resources on which to build a local food culture
- Not all sections of local population engage equally with local food cultures (eg: variations by class, ethnicity, age and gender)
- Not all claims to localness have equal validity.

BOOKS
ALS

46

FRUIT SALAD
FRESH FRUIT & VEGETABLES



Local
Little witley
Tomatoes
£ 1.30 pk
Local/
English/classi

Vine tomatoes
Great Witley
* as priced *

Local
English Tomatoes
loose plum
Tomatoes
£3.20 kg
Little witley
classi



The tangible presence of local food cultures

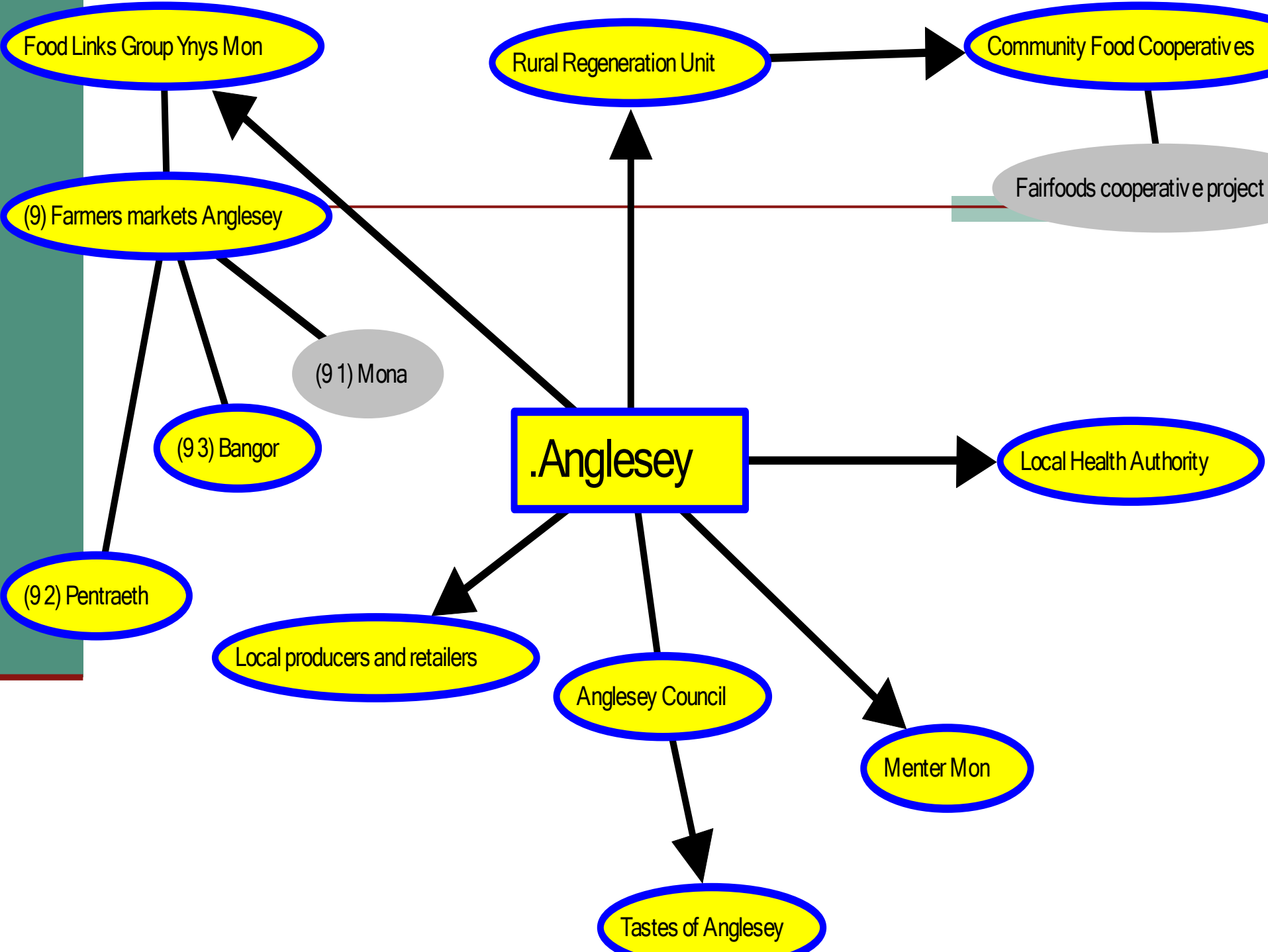
Presence of local produce in

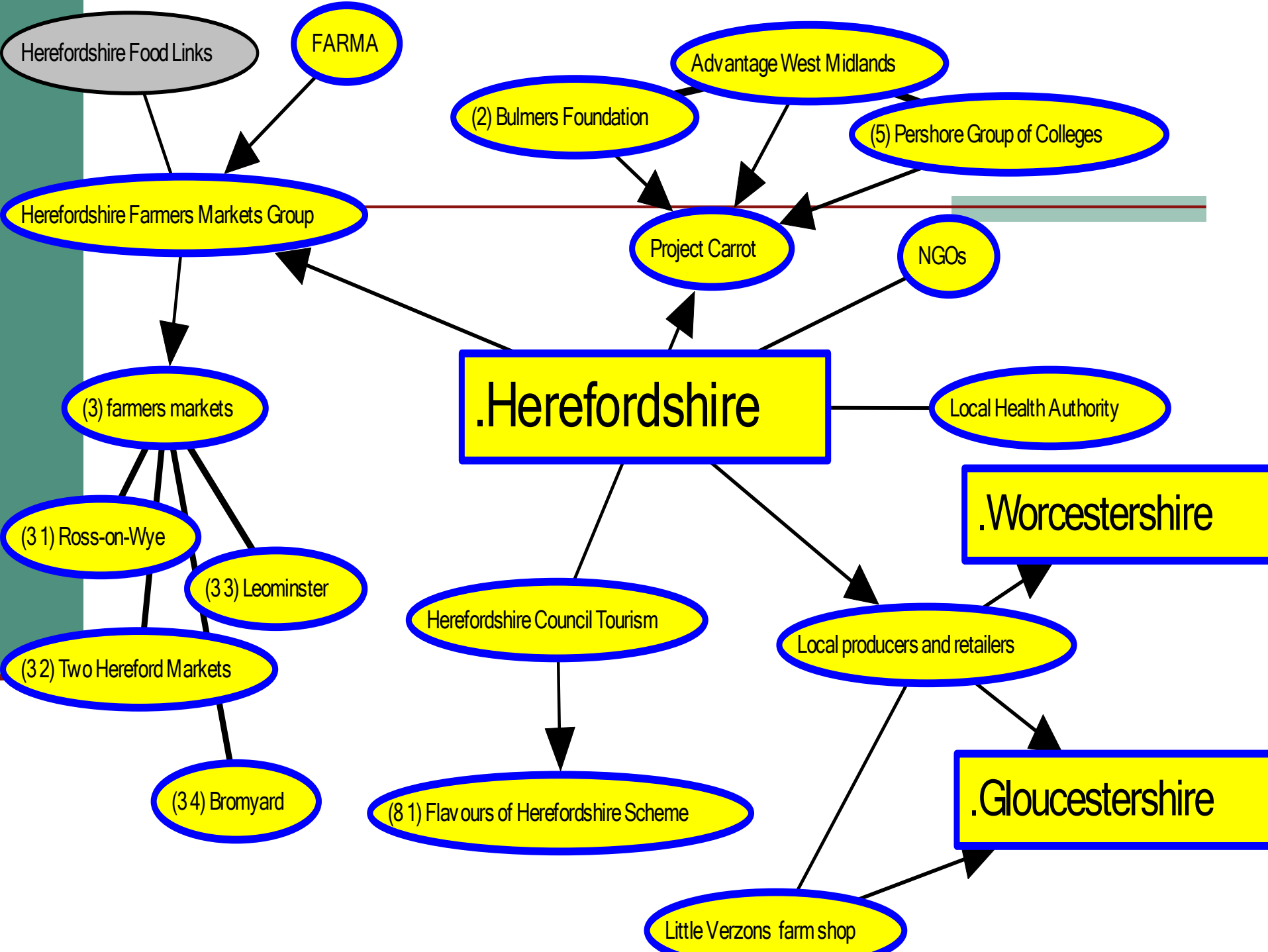
- Shops, restaurants, and pubs
- Farm shops and farmers markets
- Role of 'champions' such as chefs, restaurateurs,
- Promotional activity by local agencies.

This links to the policy arena and networks of bodies/agencies that promote local food.

Evidence of such networks operating in the three case study areas of our project:

Anglesey, Herefordshire and Lincolnshire.





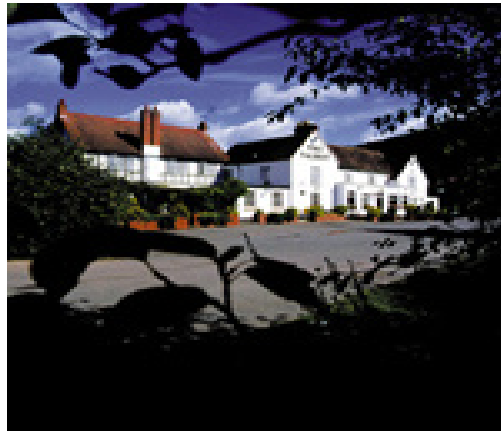
What's so good about the local?

- Retaining income locally (multiplier effects of local purchases)
- Capturing value added (local processing, distribution, consumption)
- Supporting local businesses
- Strengthening local connections and sense of identity
- Building local capacities and retaining/developing skills
- Raising morale, confidence, social competence and awareness of local assets
- Spreading risks
- Increasing sustainability

Thus, from a policy stand point:

- **Strengthening the local community is a good thing, and**
- **Building links around food is a good way to do it!**

Local food culture in action



The local has no intrinsic meaning

- People have strong commitments to particular conceptions of the local and its benefits. Questioning this or asking for more evidence often creates an emotive debate and furore.

- There has been some questioning of the benefits of the local in relation to issues of:
 - **Equality of participation**
 - **Democratisation**
 - **Accessibility**
 - **Exclusion**
 - **Defensiveness**
 - **Elitism**
 - **Implicit conservatism**
 - **Limited scope for offsetting 'mainstream' practices**
 - **Strength of the evidence base**

The place of consumer

**“Consumption is not a unified and coherent activity”
(Warde, 2005:146).**

Recognition of the contested nature of the local does not extend to recognition of the sophistication and complexity of the consumer and consumption.

- Part of a social movement engaged in resistance/opposition to globalization?
- A dupe of the big corporate interests?
- A footsoldier for local elites engaged in ‘defensive localism’?
- Preoccupied with one-dimensional thinking?
- Sovereign chooser developing personal expression and self-identity?

Some evidence from focus groups

7 Focus Groups (40 consumers in total)

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Anglesey (Llangefni) – 12 consumers

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Herefordshire (Leominster and Hereford) – 11 consumers

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Lincolnshire (Market Rasen and Louth) – 17 consumers

Social Characteristics

- Mostly women
- 60% over 45 years old
- 60% with A Levels or Degrees Approx.
- 60% not in full time paid work

Preliminary Results...

Definitions of local food are various and ambiguous.

- **When consumers discuss local food, a range of different meanings are in play, and this enables negotiation and flexibility in what they choose to include or exclude from their definitions of local.**
- **More attached to meanings of 'quality' (freshness, taste, visual appearance, seasonality, 'good quality') than to geographic or spatial characteristics.**
- **Discrepancy between consumers' meanings and the meanings of local food promoted by policy, civic and economic bodies (more attached to spatial definitions)**

Reasons for buying local food:

- **Freshness**
- **Taste**
- **Seasonality**
- **Aesthetics (not packaged...wrapped up in plastic)**
- **Support local community (local farmers and small retailers/specialist shops)**
- **Environmentally friendly ('take planes out of the skies!' shortening food miles)**
- **Value the close relationship/bond with the farmer or retailer**
- **Organic and local – food safety/health issues.**



LOCAL
 EXTRA SMALL
 SMALL
 VINE TOMATOES
 £1.99
 500 Gms

UK LOCAL
 LARGE VINE
 £1.25
 500 Gms



UK LOCAL
 ECKINGTON
 BUNCH
 BEETROOT 2 FOR 99P
 49P BUNCH
 FOR 99P



UK LOCAL BROWN
 WICKHAM ROAD
 SANTA CHERRY
 TOMATOES
 99P
 PER PUNNET

What's less good about local food??

- **Lack of diversity (exotic/ethnic ingredients removed from diets):**

“I like bananas!! I don't want to live without bananas!!” (Lincolnshire FG)

- **Issues of social justice and sustainable communities in third world countries:**

“I think it's quite nice to buy things from Zimbabwe and places like that because it's nice to think that their farmers are actually growing something to get income” (Lincolnshire FG).

- **Poly tunnels:**

“One thing I don't buy local is strawberries in Herefordshire because they're grown in poly tunnels” (Herefordshire FG)

“I actually think that they [tomatoes] are not so good from poly tunnels, I do think the taste disappears...” (Lincolnshire FG)

Different perceptions of towns/regions...

A - Look...look...walk up the street!!

**B - We're not going to be very typical for you are we?
(laughter)**

A – We grow it all here... I know in Wales you've got difficulty in growing some of the stuff, but it's fabulous here!!

“People do come to Louth, and you are always getting letters in the paper saying what a lovely place it is, with the shops, the butchers, it's got a very nice atmosphere”

(Louth participant)

Different perceptions of towns/regions...

A - I mean my daughter lives in Lincolnshire and it is probably one of the best places for vegetables, going around there... I mean they live in Stanford and the market there is full of local vegetables...

B – I think the farmers market in Hereford is quite poor!

C – Yeah I think it's poor... very poor... and I think it's expensive...

(Hereford FG participants)

Different perceptions of towns/regions...

“You see, the old markets are gradually dying down now and that’s where you used to buy all the vegetables and fruit”

“I used to live in Lincolnshire and get all my veg and fruit from a van, if it was available...” “And when I was in the Midlands, got all mine from the markets, some very good markets there”

“It would be nice to buy local because I have queried why we cant have a farmers market on the island...someone said there’s one in Safeways, but that’s in Bangor! (...) It would be nice to have one locally...”

(Llangefni FG participants)

Closing remarks/conclusion

Localization represents a set of alternatives or trade offs

Homogenization

All year round

Social justice

Quantity

Cheap food

Institutional trust

Diversity

Seasonality

Benefit to community

Quality

Value added foods

Personal Trust

Not polar opposites but opportunities and constraints

Consumers are aware of trade-offs and the need to compromise....

“I find shopping a constant compromise! Do I buy organic? Do I buy Fair Trade? Do I buy local? I want to buy local but I can’t ... it’s really frustrating but I can’t ... it’s really difficult to buy apples from Herefordshire!”



The team!

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