



DE4 Food

www.de4food.org.uk

REconomy Project

Mission

De4 Food was set up in 2012 as a co-operative social enterprise with the aim of enabling local food producers in and around the DE4 postcode area to supply local consumers with food and related products at fair prices to both.

Is there a link with Transition?

DE4 Food developed out of Transition Matlock's work on building a sustainable local food economy through encouraging people grow their own, to shop local, and to seek out local food businesses. Our history is here: www.de4food.org.uk/our-history.html

Your product or service – how much does it help improve resilience in your local community or elsewhere?

We source local sustainable food from local producers and provide an online market place to food producers to trade with consumers. We are building resilience in food by providing an easy route to market for existing local food producers but also providing a business support service and testing ground for new local food businesses, to test if new products will work, and if new food businesses are viable, and if so what are the best marketing strategies for local food. Two new food businesses have been able to set up using DE4 food as their route to market. We have given advice to two more who hope to start trading through us in the next few months.

Employees

No paid employees yet although we have 6 volunteers. We aim to employ the manager on 20 hours a week by the end of the first year trading.

Are you in profit? If not, when do you anticipate being so? How long have you been trading?

We have been trading 6 months and our turnover for November to April was £12,408. We anticipate getting to the point where we can cover all our costs, including the cost of employing the manager on 20 hours a week by the beginning of the second year.

What is your company structure and why did you choose it?

Industrial and Provident Society Co-operative. We felt strongly we wanted to be a Co-op of consumers and producers working together to understand what makes a sustainable food economy at a local level.

What about financial sustainability? Are you trading or part-trading without money?

We are trading and retain 15% of the costs of produce sold to cover DE4 Food costs. We started with no grant funding. We designed the enterprise with low start up costs and we asked the community of members to loan us their skills / time / equipment and we would pay back when we had started trading. For example, our website was designed by a member who submitted the invoice on the understanding that we would not be able to pay it until we had been trading a few months and started to build up a surplus. We have now paid the web designer. Another member paid for the printing of our leaflets, knowing we would pay back this loan when we were able to. This loan will be paid back next month. We have used the Stroudco Food Hub software -- which is open source and therefore free to use.

Our up-front start up costs were very low - £110 for a years insurance. We have recently received a grant of £500 from Derbyshire County Council to enable us to buy more cool boxes to allow us to deliver out to distribution hubs (local pubs) in rural villages that have no shops.

Are you looking to build more common wealth & ownership and is priority your profit sharing and/or community benefits versus more traditional investor returns?

We are a co-op when we do make a profit then that enables us to renegotiate with producers, employees and consumers. We will balance paying fair wages with retaining a smaller margin on produce thereby benefiting the food producers and allowing the price of food to be reduced to our members.

Localisation – are you sourcing, distributing and interacting locally?

All our food comes from within a 15-mile radius – most comes from within a 5-mile radius. We are focusing on building resilient supply chains recognising that we can not grow all types of food in our locality, and that to build a resilient food economy, DE4 Food needs to support the growth of local food skills and infrastructure – in addition to food production. In other words, the need for local bakers rather than just Derbyshire grown wheat and the need for local dairies and the craft skills that go alongside.

We are discussing with our members the issues around local food versus sustainable/ethical food. We are researching the existing local food economy investigating the potential for more resilient local food businesses to trade locally and can see the gaps where new and existing businesses could potentially be trading locally rather than those products being bought from elsewhere. Localism in Derbyshire food has often meant producers developing ‘niche market’ expensive products to sell throughout the UK and beyond as regional foods. We do not believe this to be sustainable. Our approach to localization is very different as we focus on producers supplying the staples of meat, veg and fruit and local processing businesses such as millers, brewers, butchers, abattoirs and dairies at the town and village level.

Climate impacts – negative, beneficial or neutral?

Our climate impact is neutral and hopefully moving towards beneficial. We do deliver our food orders by car to households and to distribution hubs in the community. But as we deliver bread, meat, veg boxes, etc in one delivery round this replaces the 3 separate deliver rounds that the butcher, baker and veg box scheme used to do in the area. We favour low input agriculture and our farmers are either certified organic or do not use pesticides and herbicides. We hold no stock so have no food waste at the end of each trading day.

Anything else you want to share with us?

We have learnt a lot about the problems of trying to localize the food economy in an area where the landscape and climate does not favor market gardening or arable production. Localising food in a traditional hill farming area has thrown up lots of challenges to the traditional way of thinking about growing and eating food. We are using ‘patchwork farming’ ideas of growing vegetables in small spaces, having lots of small-scale growers rather than field scale. The educational role of DE4 Food is immense as a diet based on local food means going to back to vast regional differences and in doing so challenging assumptions about “healthy diets” based on a wide range of fruit and vegetables, chicken and pork.

Our new business/enterprise support and development work is becoming increasingly important as we see what new businesses are needed to fill the gaps and we recognise the need to find funding mechanisms for this aspect of our work.

