



CORK FOOD POLICY COUNCIL

Pure Cork – real food for all

SUBMISSION: PROPOSED CASUAL TRADING BYE-LAWS

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Introduction: Who we are

This submission is sent on behalf of the Cork Food Policy Council which was established in 2013 to work towards the achievement of a fairer, healthier, more secure and sustainable food system throughout the region. The CFPC supports the development of partnerships between statutory agencies, community groups, businesses and other institutions to promote knowledge, skills and improved access to quality food in Cork. We work closely with Cork City Council and a range of agencies (eg HSE Health Action Zones and CUH; Cork Healthy Cities), as well as businesses (including Musgraves), to improve access to healthy and sustainable food for the people of Cork.

Some background

Around the world, markets are vital places that provide the backbone of the local food economy. Invariably occupying a strategic central location, markets draw together local people in the buying and selling of food. For the traveller, markets are privileged spaces that offer a window into “real life”; an opportunity to observe people engaged in an everyday activity that provides a microscopic lens on the local food culture. In an age when the giant retail chains – many foreign-owned - appear to be in the ascendancy, it is heartening to know that local markets are undergoing something of a renaissance. Whereas supermarkets stock foods largely transformed from their natural states to accommodate the demands of long-distance transportation, central warehousing, and long shelf life, local markets deal principally in fresh products with shorter life spans and much of it sourced within the region. The epidemiological evidence clearly demonstrates that as a population we need to be eating more servings of fresh fruits and vegetables and a great deal less by way of processed products containing refined ingredients that are often high in salt, sugar and saturated fats. Local markets generally prove a healthier dietary option.

Moreover, people are gradually returning to markets because they appreciate the human interaction, the character and taste of the food and the sense of trust that comes from shopping personally. In recent years, Europe and North America have witnessed a significant growth in new forms of food retailing whereby fresh and high-quality produce is sold directly by the producers themselves. The most visible example of this are the development of farmers’ markets (FM) in many urban locations with numbers in the many thousands across North America alone. The high level of personal interaction that is a hallmark of exchange within these markets, offers a novel experience to customers who have become accustomed to the impersonal nature of human contact reduced to the barcode scanning of

the contents of their shopping basket. Such experiences have the capacity to recover the collective human experience associated with the preparation and exchange of foods and contribute to a greater relocalization of the food economy and the retention of value within the region.

County Cork

Cork, as we know, is part of the bedrock of the national agricultural economy with a strong tradition and world-class expertise in the dairy sector in particular. It is regarded as central to the achievement of the objectives set out in the national strategies of Food Harvest 2020 and Food Wise 2025. Yet Cork also regards itself – and crucially is regarded by other influential and international experts – as the Food Capital of Ireland. Such a label is not applied for the number of dairy cattle in the County but because of the variety and quality of small and medium-sized producers in the region who are working with first-class primary ingredients.

Moreover, as past Academic Director of the NUI Diploma in Speciality Food Production, which has run at UCC for over twelve years producing more than 150 graduates many of whom have gone on to create highly successful food businesses in Cork and elsewhere, I recognise the extraordinary value of farmers' markets as the testing laboratories for these new enterprises. It is vital to remember that for every Glenilen and Gubbeen that now contributes to national export earnings with their award-winning products, consumer testing and evaluation by those businesses was performed in the markets of Skibbereen and Bantry.

A second aspect of the rural economy in Cork to which we need to pay particular attention is the contribution of tourism, particularly in the more peripheral parts of the County. Here, visitors and their spending has a critical role to play in circulating money through the local economy. With limited resources and attractions, food and scenery provide the key pillars to drawing people to these areas and markets are as essential to this as restaurants and pubs. The tourism experience is visibly enhanced by markets, not limited by them. Indeed, one of the key pillars of the entire Wild Atlantic Way is the food offering provided by local producers, restaurateurs and markets. We simply cannot sustain the image of Cork as a leading food tourism destination if the only shop window available to visitors through which to view food is limited to the branded multiples, many of which have no interest in carrying local products.

There has been far too much suspicion around farmers' markets by local authorities and other agencies in Ireland with a view that they are a source of food safety risk and fiscally unregulated. We believe this has fostered an entirely misplaced hostility to stall-holders most of whom are working exceptionally hard for very modest returns and indeed making a major contribution to the economic life of many small rural towns. We also believe that FM are making a truly valuable contribution to the dietary health of many lower-income families who are otherwise poorly served by the fresh food offerings in small supermarkets, convenience stores, petrol stations and creamery co-ops across the County. Indeed, it should be noted that in the United States FM are now playing a major role in delivering food to many low-income communities under the Federal Supplemental Nutritional Assistance programme (SNAP) with over 6,500 separate FM registered with the USDA and receiving \$20m in welfare redemptions. Early research evidence indicates a marked improvement in dietary health for welfare recipients using the FM scheme.

Our recommendations

1. That Cork County Council takes a leadership role by establishing the status of farmers' markets in Ireland outside the terms of the Casual Trading Act. We understand that this may require legislative change but that this should be advocated for in terms of improved dietary health. We believe this should be framed in terms of the provision of fresh food and drink largely comprising ingredients from the local area. Fresh food comprises here fruit and vegetables, fresh and preserved meat, dairy products, and craft/artisan food items from the vicinity.
2. Nevertheless, we understand that some markets have evolved to include other categories of goods (clothing, tools, seeds etc.) for which there is local demand and which ought to be accommodated on a local basis. Moreover, the category of 'hot food to go' should be limited in number of vendors and include a local and/or healthy criteria to avoid the proliferation of 'burger vans'. Again, this needs to be evaluated on a local basis.
3. In order for such locally appropriate criteria to be established, each market should constitute a management committee comprising representatives from amongst stall-holders, the County Council, the local chamber of commerce as well as from the ranks of the community. The management committee will need to appoint an individual who is responsible for running the market (taking fees, resolving issues). There will be clear lines of accountability in operation and each market will be

responsible for ensuring the highest standards of sustainability and transparency in its operation.

4. Towns where there is no existing FM should be encouraged and enabled to establish one. The new market will give preference to owner led, locally made and sourced, high quality, and small-scale foods. It will aim to have a diverse mix of offerings. The process by which potential stall-holders apply will be transparent and all applicants will receive a written confirmation or rejection and the reason for such rejection provided. Once a stall holder receives a license to trade on this site they will be expected to attend regularly, although seasonality of production and extended periods of poor weather are recognised constraints.
5. Cork County Council will need to provide running water and electricity in an adequate capacity for the development of any food market, but the costs of such provision will be covered by fees collected from stall-holders.
6. Finally, any revision of market bye-laws must not only be informed by appropriate legal norms, but also by the necessity of improving access to healthy, nutritious and sustainably-produced food. If Cork is to retain its mantle of 'Food Capital of Ireland' then it can best do so by enhancing the status of farmers' markets and ensuring that an invigorated network of markets across the region will ensure quality food for all in the years ahead.