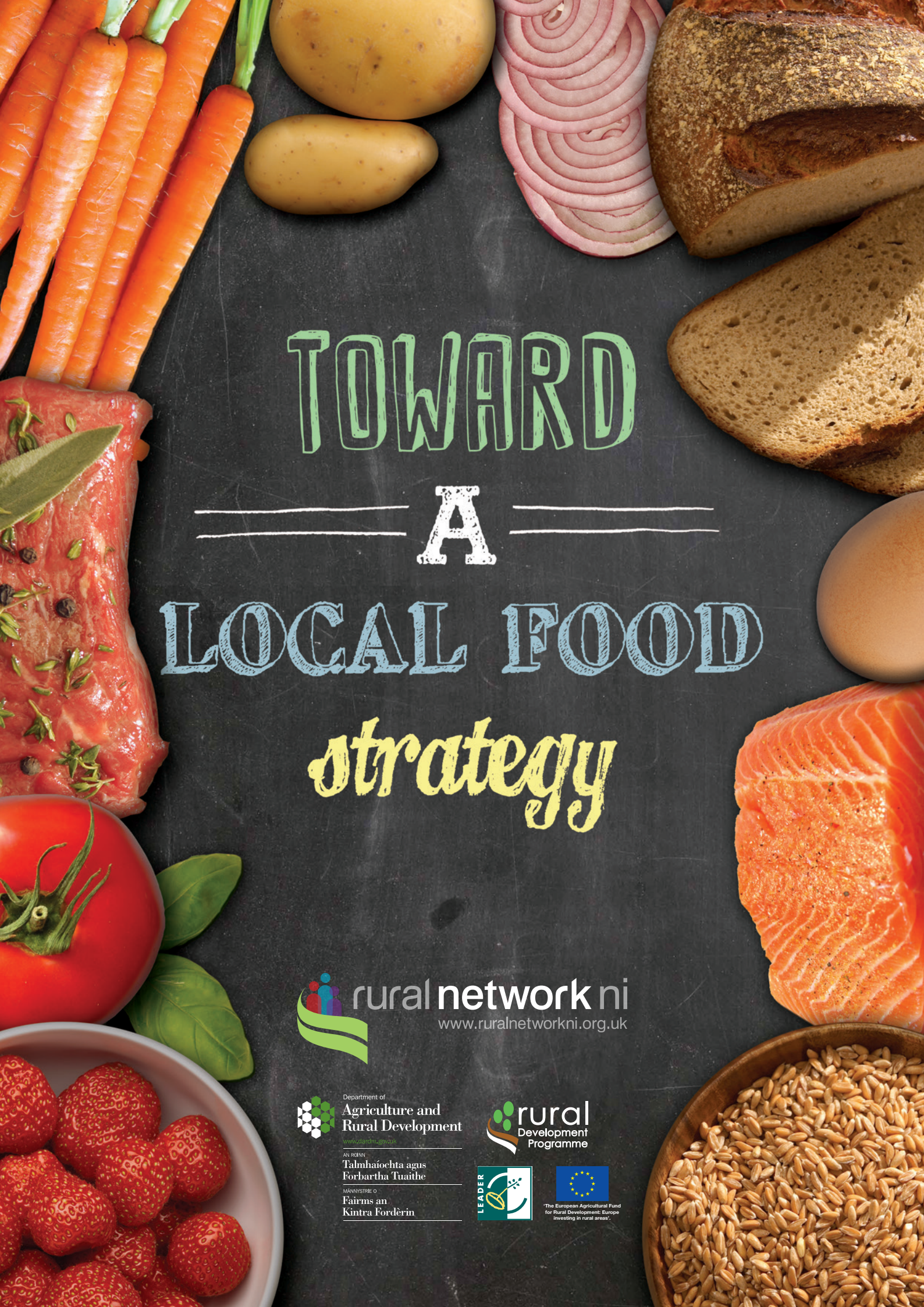




# TOWARD — A — LOCAL FOOD *strategy*



Department of  
Agriculture and  
Rural Development  
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AN RINN  
Talmhaíochta agus  
Forbartha Tuaithe  
MANNYSTIRE O  
Fairs an  
Kintra Forderin



"The European Agricultural Fund  
for Rural Development: Europe  
investing in rural areas."

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## Ministerial Foreword



I am very pleased to find myself writing the foreword to this food report. The report and its attendant 'Tool Kit' is the culmination of many months of study and analysis undertaken by the 'Food Thematic Working Group', one of 6 thematic subgroups within the Rural Network for

the north of Ireland. The group, comprised of volunteers from the LEADER Local Action Groups is committed to increasing and supporting the contribution that small agri-food businesses can make to our rural communities, and economies. I thank these members for their dedication to rural community development and in particular for their efforts in developing this report and tool kit.

Thankfully our agri-food industry continues to grow and is a key driver in region's export led growth and that sets the context for this report. The study recognises that the small family farm remains the heart of our agri-food industry. It examines how supporting the development of local food production and marketing can help localised economies and those small farm businesses.

Widening out its scope the study goes on to illustrate that developing a greater understanding and appreciation of local food promotes greater connection between producers and consumers. Using case studies the report illustrates that this can play out within local communities as a method of helping to address food poverty and improving diet through education and community based initiatives.

I hope that this report will stimulate interest in local food particularly among producers, procurers, community organisations and those with statutory responsibilities. As we go forward I know that the tool kit will provide a useful aid to those developing local food strategies or setting up in the market place.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michelle O'Neill".

**MICHELLE O'NEILL MLA**  
**Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development**

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## Introduction

The development of local food systems are recognised as an important and integral part of the sustainable development of rural economies. By incorporating the consideration of local food systems into their wider local development strategies, local authorities and agencies such as LEADER groups can help realise the potential of the local food sector to contribute to the development of their areas.

By inclusion of such strategies and consideration, agencies can achieve significant impacts for their communities far beyond those of economic development and indeed at a European level, policy encourages the uptake of such approaches in supporting Local Food Systems and short supply chains.

It is against this backdrop that the Rural Network for Northern Ireland formed the Local Food Thematic Working Group (TWG) which has produced this Resource Pack. The Resource considers some of the key impacts and drivers,

both local and global that impact on the sustainability, versatility and viability of our rural communities, and how these drivers inform the concept of "local food". It highlights how the concept of 'local food' should be broadened out from its current association with farmers markets or niche artisan foods into district-or country-wide models based on investment in local production and distribution solutions.

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## About The Local Food Thematic Working Group (TWG)

Thematic Working Groups (TWG) are advocated across European Networks as a means of supporting and informing the implementation of current EU Rural Development Policy. They can contribute to the understanding and diffusion of 'know-how' and experiences and improvement of policy implementation effectiveness. Formed in 2012, the Local Food TWG, facilitated by the Rural Network for Northern Ireland, allowed those involved in the delivery of the Rural Development Programme, to consider the current context of the development of local food, and how the Rural Development Programme can facilitate its potential role in supporting the sustainability of the wider rural economy and rural communities.

The aims set for the Group include:

- To define what is meant by and assess the current and potential role of local food systems in NI economically and in its contribution to quality of life
- To examine development models and strategies from other programmes and other EU regions to identify key lessons for the development of local food systems in NI
- To review the support available to local food systems in NI through the Rural Development Programme and other initiatives
- To consider the potential opportunities for local models of agri-food development within the context of the new Rural Development Programme
- To develop a range of recommendations for the development of local food systems and or models which are appropriate and which support the concept of Northern Ireland as an environmentally sustainable and "green" economy
- To engage with external experts and development bodies in promoting the development of an integrated and coherent strategy for supporting the future development of local foods

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## Membership

The group comprises of representatives of Local Action Groups across Northern Ireland; Wilbert Mayne (SWARD), Edward Adamson (GROW), Cllr Allan Rainey (ARC North West), Albert Allen (ARC North West), Mary Hunter (ARC North West), Cllr Jim Speers (SOAR) and Patsy Bradley (NER). Creative Edge, an independent consultancy was appointed to

work alongside the Rural Network for Northern Ireland to facilitate the workplan of the Local Food Thematic Working Group. Nick Mack of Creative Edge led the delivery team. Nick's interests span rural development, sustainable development, food and farming, health, tackling fuel poverty, and business innovation and collaboration.

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## Activities of Group

The TWG have engaged in a number of facilitated workshop sessions, supported in their discussions by research and input provided by the Rural Network for Northern Ireland, Creative Edge, and direct case study input from individuals/businesses involved in the sector.

Based on this programme of activity, the TWG have developed a series of recommendations on how local food could be supported within the next Rural Development programme and has produced this wider Resource Pack to help support the development of Local Food Systems and strategies across Northern Ireland.

## This Resource Pack

As technology changes, the ideas, initiatives, methods and potential behind 'local food' are also changing and developing with the result that it may now offer meaningful market opportunities, particularly to smaller farms, rural communities and Local Authorities.

This Resource Pack, which is made up of four documents, provides a detailed briefing and guidance on the emerging business models and practices shaping local food. It addresses the rationale for investing in the development of local food, responding to emerging market opportunities and the pressing issues of food poverty, food security and sustainable development. The pack illustrates the variety of models and practices shaping local food provision and addresses many of the barriers which previously limited the scope and value of local food as a business option. The pack also draws together good practice to provide a step by step guide for developing a Local Food System appropriate to different regions and strategic purposes as part of rural or local development.

The Resource Pack will be of interest to those involved in LEADER<sup>1</sup> delivery under the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme, and those responsible for delivery of INTERREG<sup>2</sup> or other local economic development measures. Because local food supply and demand encompasses countryside, village, town and city businesses and communities this pack is particularly relevant to Local Authorities who are best placed to lead on the development of a vibrant local food infrastructure. The potential benefits also have cross-departmental relevance to Government and may be of interest to new or established producer groups or co-operative organisations looking to develop their links with the wider community and broaden their activities.

The four Sections of the Resource Pack are as follows:

### 1 - Towards a Local Food Strategy - Developing Local Food Definitions

Introducing the concept of local food, this chapter looks at how to define "local" and explains what is meant by a 'Local Food System' before examining some models of how local food can be viewed as a system.

### 2 - Drivers and potential Benefits of Local Food Systems

Section 2 takes the discussion of Section 1 forward by examining the key influencers environment, economy, politics and health. Issues such as food security and sustainable rural economies that are driving a renewed interest in the concepts of short supply chains and local food sourcing are discussed. The chapter looks at these factors both from the global and local perspective and goes on to consider in detail the benefits that such approaches to food production and consumption could have in Northern Ireland.

### 3 - Initiatives and Innovations

Having investigated what a local food system is, how it can be organised, and what the potential benefits might be, Section 3 expands this thinking by looking at a number of local and international examples and sets out to address some of the key issues raised in earlier Sections.

### 4 - Supporting the development of Local Food Systems: A Toolkit for Action

The final Section can be read as a stand-alone guide for anyone considering a Local Food Development Strategy. As such it may be of particular interest to local authorities and other public sector bodies and will be of interest to partnership structures such as LEADER groups and Community Planning Partnerships.

<sup>1</sup> - LEADER ("Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale", meaning 'Links between the rural economy and development actions') is a local development method which allows local actors to develop an area by using its endogenous development potential. The LEADER approach forms one of the four axes of Rural Development Policy 2007–2013", LEADER Gateway, European Network for Rural Development, <http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader/>

<sup>2</sup> - The INTERREG Community Initiative is the name formerly given to range of European Territorial Co-operation Programmes funded under the European Fund for Regional Development (ERDF) supporting cross-border, transnational, and inter-territorial co-operation

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## Recommendations

The role of the TWG on the development of Local Food was principally to inform the programme development process by providing the necessary facilitation and research. As an outcome of this activity a number of key conclusions and recommendations have been identified in order to help those involved in the development of the next Rural Development Programme utilise the potential of “local food” in the sustainable development of our rural areas. These are:-

- Opportunities are needed to support small local food projects linked to farm diversification, business development, village renewal and rural tourism. LEADER groups should give specific consideration to the role of and vision for “local food” in the preparation of their local development strategies or action plans.
- Local food should be recognised as serving 2 core purposes:-
  - o Providing good, affordable produce for local communities
  - o Providing authentic retail and tourism experiences complementing other aspects of tourism and hospitality.
- Schemes should specifically consider the needs of small producers (both farmers and processors) assisting them to identify and serve local market needs.

- Opportunities involving both farmers and the wider community should be availed of in terms of raising the value of agriculture and local food production, with a view to re-connecting local communities to local food.
- Schemes should be considered supporting local circumstances and valuing the range of models and various players involved, e.g community supported agriculture, community buying co-operatives, food hubs etc.
- Schemes should be encouraged that support those in the supply chain to maximise the potential of a “local food” focus for tourism. This could be done through the development of supply chain networks, education and training programmes (e.g in the history or provenance for local foods, their benefits and in local/traditional recipes or dishes) and marketing and promotion of the above.
- Support for local food projects should be available to a wider variety of applicants including private individuals, community groups, co-operatives and farming groups, subject to the objectives of any specific call

These recommendations may also be relevant to other areas of Government policy.

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## The Way Forward

The development of local food systems presents significant potential for rural areas. DARD through its design of the Rural Development Programme (2014-2020) and other initiatives can use this opportunity to increase the economic benefits for farmers, new entrepreneurs and rural communities. Local foods offer additional ways to utilise rural resources and to enhance capacity for resilience and innovation helping rural communities and economies sustain and grow stronger through difficult economic times.

Although Northern Ireland has operated the Processing and Marketing Scheme and has a Regional Food Programme, the region does not have a specific policy or fund to support and develop local food as demonstrated through other initiatives in other regions of the UK or Ireland. Such an initiative would complement the Agri-food Strategy Board’s “Going for Growth” Strategy and small scale or niche producers would be able to participate in the wider export led industry growth.

Importantly, such initiatives would improve the integration and understanding between farmers and non-farming rural dwellers. In doing so some of the key aspects of poverty and disadvantage would be addressed by promoting sustainable business development based on food and tourism as well as encouraging the development of healthier lifestyles through improved food and nutrition awareness and access to affordable fresh food.

In order to support LEADER, local authorities and agencies in taking forward any of these recommendations or other learning from this report, the Local Food Strategy Toolkit (section 4) can act as a key primer in beginning to consider this issue at a local level, to see what the actual potential for local food development is within an area, and to put in place the appropriate infrastructure to support this.

Although originating from a rural development perspective, the Toolkit and the development of a Local Food Strategy should not be seen as solely a rural development issue but a cross functional one involving aspects of rural development, community and enterprise development, health promotion, education and tourism among others. As such the tool may prove particularly useful to inform a partnership approach to local development as anticipated by the forthcoming introduction of Community Planning in Northern Ireland.