

Sustainable Food Procurement Conference, All Nations Centre, Cardiff 23 March 2007

Workshop report

Sustainable food chains: fruit and vegetables

Chair: **Kevin Thomas**, Horticultural Network Wales

Anne Evans of Blaencamel spoke on behalf of a group of growers supplying the Organic Fresh Food company. Anne and her partner have been growing organic vegetables at Blaencamel for over 30 years and are becoming increasingly interested in the public sector, and they exemplify sustainability:

- *Sustainable production*: composting is at the heart of the production at Blaencamel, converting 'waste' into a useful product and capturing carbon, which means that Blaencamel is actually a carbon negative business.
- *Biodiversity*: The farm supports rich woodland, river and grassland habitats.
- *Education*: They have worked with local schools for many years. The public are welcomed on the land.

Alan Aitken from Carmarthenshire County Council said they had been working closely with the first tier supplier and local businesses to source more of their produce locally. His main points were:

- Funding is the key constraint. For every 1p increase in the cost of a school meal, an extra £35,000 has to be found.
- There is now much more pressure on public sector bodies to be open about how the procurement process works.
- Procurement staff need to gain a much better understanding of the supply chain, and to talk to growers directly.
- Supply chains should be reassessed in the light of concerns about food miles and rising oil prices
- We need ways of quantifying non-economic benefits e.g. low carbon emissions and food miles
- 'Quality' should not be based on supermarket specifications, which tend to be cosmetic, but on nutrition. New specifications could be worked out in consultation with growers.

Discussion

- *Funding*: The benefits of local and sustainable procurement were becoming more widely accepted. However, the money has to come from somewhere. We need to do much more to quantify the benefits of sustainable procurement before the Department of Health, for instance, can be credibly approached for a slice of their budget.
- *Supply chain issues*: Producers put forward some suggestions to increase the participation of local suppliers including:
 - Set up contracts directly with producers for higher volume crops (e.g. potatoes), with the first tier supplier delivering the other items.
 - County Councils must make their requirements known at least a year in advance-vegetables take time to grow!
 - There could also be scope to work the other way round, i.e. growers could inform the Council what is available at different time of year.
 - Simplify procurement contracts to increase participation from smaller growers
- *Education*: Children must become involved in food production, and cooking, from an early age.