



# LEITRIM FOOD STRATEGY 2017 - 2021

Plotting ambitious  
& sustainable growth  
towards a strong &  
vibrant food economy



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# INTRODUCTION

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As we look across County Leitrim, it is clear that food is something that connects us all. It is a driver of employment and health and a significant part of our economic, social, environmental and cultural identity. In the last decade Leitrim has transformed itself as a food processing and food tourism destination with enormous appeal to locals, visitors, and investors. Through this, the first Leitrim Food Strategy 2017- 2021, we look towards the future to embrace new and innovative ways to think and act, so that together, our businesses, institutions and residents can reinforce and grow Leitrim's position as leader for food, as a food county we can all be proud of.

This Food Strategy has been careful to play to the strengths of County Leitrim. The focus is on being locally relevant, pragmatic, scalable and implementable. The Strategy has been developed after extensive consultation and co-design and is designed to inspire new ambitions, new ways of thinking and to create pathways to business and export growth and jobs. It brings together expertise from across the food sector to propose a set of 54 actions to grow opportunity, build resilience, and increases sustainability. It recognises that the foods we produce are reliant on the health of our natural resources. That much talked about link from the primary producer to the plate is at the heart of who we are and what we do.



## INTRODUCTION

The aims and expected outcomes from implementation of the Leitrim Food Strategy are multiple and will be observed right across the local food system to bring life and prosperity to communities across our county. It is clear that a decade of food sector focus in County Leitrim has brought the sector to a very exciting place with a strong culture of innovation and entrepreneurship. Food is one of the unifying forces within the community - represented by diverse culinary experiences and products.

### Forward thinking initiatives that stand out include:-

- Support for the organics sector (going back to the 1990s), Leitrim really has a USP in the strength of its organics sector. How can it be further developed in 2017- 2021?
- Progressing a PGI application for boxty;
- The Food Hub, a leading multi-tenant production and education project;
- The Taste Leitrim food tourism project instigated late in 2015 now includes over 90 food producers and places to eat. To be named as a Top 10 Foodie Destination in first year of applying is testament to how special our food county is;
- The holistic approach of Leitrim County Council in attracting and supporting external food and drink companies to locate in the county (e.g. The Shed Distillery);
- The proactive nurturing of local food companies through mentoring, training and grant aid support.

No economic profiling can capture the sense of pride in place palpable in Co. Leitrim which has its own unique personality. Leitrim may be Ireland's smallest populated county but it packs one serious culinary punch!



*BOXTY, a legend of a food product synonymous with Leitrim and the region!*

As highlighted in the 2015-2020 Leitrim Local Community and Development Plan (LCDC), encouragingly the county's population is growing, and on a consistent basis across the County. It increased by almost 10% to 31,798 between 2006 and 2011 and is projected to grow by a further 8% to 35,700 by 2022.

While it is a rural County with a very low population density, most of the 2006-2011 growth has been urban-based. Leitrim has a strong private sector economy which is dominated by micro-businesses and entrepreneurship is strong with Leitrim's self-employed income per head being higher than the rest of the country, even during the 2007-2011 crisis years.

Not surprisingly, 70% of jobs are in Carrick on Shannon, Manorhamilton, Ballinamore, Mohill, Dromahair and Kinlough. In 2011 of Leitrim's 8,042 (fixed location) jobs, 5,548 (69%) were held by people living in Leitrim and 2,494 (31%) by people commuting into Leitrim. Meanwhile 40% of Leitrim people in work (3,771) commuted out of the County: 70% of these people live in rural Leitrim.

## WHAT MAKES US SPECIAL?

The development of the Taste Leitrim brand gave us the opportunity to stand back and reflect on our food offering. Leitrim's food culture is rooted in biodiversity and diversity. Inspired by our natural and unspoilt environment, we are a real fusion of backgrounds and experiences. Some of us were born and grew up here; others come from all the corners of the world and made Leitrim our home. More than a name and an image, the Taste Leitrim brand was designed as a "call to action" invitation to come and sample all that Leitrim has to offer. When we ask you to Taste Leitrim, we actually invite you to taste the world.

So many of our businesses started in the depth of recession and epitomise the true character of resilience and ambition. Throw in a pinch of West of Ireland quirkiness and you get the picture! And underpinning all of this, Taste Leitrim emphasises that 'we are people's people, we enjoy your company and you will enjoy ours. We're passionate about what we do and where we do it.'



In recognising that there is considerably more potential for the sector if progressed in a planned and innovative way, the Local Enterprise Office Leitrim and Leitrim County Council commissioned the preparation of this Food Strategy for Co. Leitrim 2017- 2021. The objective of developing an action focused strategy was charged with:

- Strengthening the excellent current food initiatives that are ongoing in the county by drawing them together into one cohesive plan;
- Identifying and encouraging new activity where gaps or opportunities are presented;
- Mobilising all stakeholders in the food sector to contribute to a supportive food ecosystem that will allow businesses to grow and develop;
- Setting out and gaining consensus and support for a new vision for where we want to see the Leitrim food sector in the short, medium and long term.

In developing this Strategy, our consultations with Leitrim food producers and places to eat shows that 80% reported a slight increase in turnover in the last year.

They are however concerned that the impact of Brexit in Leitrim as a border county will be a challenge. The view was expressed that the tourism and hospitality industry is especially vulnerable in its reliance on disposable income being available. The local, national and international economies will play a huge part in the continued growth or lack of in this sector.

There are only a handful of counties in Ireland that have published a dedicated food strategy, those being the much larger counties of Cork, Limerick, Donegal and Kilkenny. Leitrim is keen to work with others in sharing best practice.

## WHY DO WE NEED A FOOD STRATEGY?

From an economic perspective, the existing and expected future employment generated by the food sector in Leitrim is significant. Our research shows that there is the full time equivalent of 534 people employed in the food sector. This does not include those employed in primary agriculture (see Theme 6). Leitrim is somewhat unique in that, there has been no one large employer in the county since the closure of Bo Peep jam factory in Drumshanbo with the loss of 100 jobs in the 1990s. Rather, employment is diversified across smaller food businesses.

### We want our Food Strategy 2017 – 2021 to:-

- Strengthen the excellent current food initiatives ongoing in the county by drawing them together in one cohesive plan; Plans within the Plan!
- Identify and encourage new activity where gaps or opportunities are presented
- Set out and gain consensus and support for a new vision for where we want to see the Leitrim food sector in the short, medium and long term
- Mobilise all stakeholders in the food sector to contribute to a supportive food ecosystem that will allow businesses to grow and develop

### What is our ultimate ambition?

- the creation of 250 new jobs in the food sector
- the establishment of 20 new food producer businesses, and 10 new places to eat in Leitrim
- export growth of 12% per annum
- 30 new food experiences per annum
- 296,000 tourists to the county will spend €28 million per annum on Leitrim food and drink by 2021

Our Food Strategy will also benefit from ambitious targets outlined in the Growth Strategy for Tourism in Leitrim 2015-2021 to double the size of the tourism sector in Leitrim by 2021. This equates to a target of 296,000 tourists, who will spend €70million. Given that Fáilte Ireland tells us that approximately two out of every five euro spent by tourists in the country goes on buying food & drink, that equates to an annual in-county spend of €28 million on Taste Leitrim food products and places to eat. Ensuring that this benefit will be realised by all in our communities and our responses in terms of a trained workforce to service this business is a key consideration and focus of this Strategy.

Beyond the obvious commercial impact, there would be a significant rise in the reputation of Leitrim as a special food destination. This recognition brings with it a sense of pride, shifts perceptions of the area, and has multiplier economic benefit to other retail and property sectors.



## THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING THE STRATEGY

Leitrim County Council and the Local Enterprise Office commissioned the development of this Strategy following a tender process. Momentum Consulting was appointed to facilitate the development of the Strategy involving widespread and provoking engagement with Leitrim's food and farming community on multiple levels to seek out existing activity, leadership, and innovation. Our consultees are the many people working with and thinking about food in Leitrim on a day-to-day basis. Consultation through surveys, interviews, meetings and workshops was used to gather important information about the existing strengths and weaknesses within the food system while also, recording many of the ideas and visions held across the Leitrim for the future of food. The steps involved were:-

### 01 Data

Extensive data collection and quantitative analysis was undertaken to understand the broader context of the food system in Leitrim. This built a strong policy and statistical framework for the Food Strategy to be successfully implemented.

### 02 Workshops

Three Leitrim Food Strategy consultation workshops were held. Firstly, Leitrim County Council CEO convened the agencies with a remit in the food and agriculture sector at a workshop in Carrick on Shannon on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2016. Two trade workshops followed in Carrick on Shannon (19<sup>th</sup> January 2017) and Rossinver (1<sup>st</sup> Feb 2017) which provided a forum for people to learn about and debate how to influence the future of the food sector in Co. Leitrim. With a total attendance of almost 40 people, the consultations were very insightful. There was a warm welcome to see this strategy developing on a countywide basis as a collective /multi business experience. The workshop events were framed around 3 questions:

1. Where do you see opportunity for your business and the food sector in Leitrim?
2. What is needed to realise that opportunity?
3. What structure would you like to see instigated?

### 03 External Meetings

Meetings were held with diverse stakeholders to gather insights from food leaders in the production, policy, education and community sectors. These insights are essential in designing the overall strategy, as people on the ground who work in food related business and projects have a strong sense of what needs to be done. All the food producers, places to eat and stakeholders interviewed value greatly the prospect of more clustering and collaboration to enable improved business linkages, enhanced access to local business capabilities and customer insight information.

### 04 Surveys

Two online surveys were drawn up, one for food producers and a second for places to eat. The surveys involved a series of probing questionnaires allowing us to gain an insightful understanding of what is needed at business level to support growth across the sector. With a response rate of 32% (28 companies), it provides a valid research baseline.

## 05 Communications

Throughout the consultation ongoing communication occurred with stakeholders engaged through email updates and feedback on workshops.

It was clear that while there is a wealth of projects already creating valuable outcomes for the sector, there is however a lack of cohesion and connectedness between these activities.

The Food Strategy details the actions required to draw these threads together so as to strengthen a thriving food culture on multiple levels. This information then informed the development of a set of final ideas and actions that respond to the key issues and opportunities identified. In this way, the process of strategy and policy development empowers participation by embedding people at the heart of the process.

## NATIONAL CONTEXT

The Leitrim Food Strategy is devised at an opportune time. Ireland's agri-food sector is positioned at the forefront of the country's economic recovery and growth so there has never been a better time to act and embrace our food sector strengths. Entrepreneurship is a key theme and deliverable in both Food Harvest 2020 and Food Wise 2025. The Food Harvest 2020 strategy emphasizes that to prosper and develop the Irish agri-food industry needs to become 'smart'.

This strategy specifically responds to their recommendation to develop new working relationships in the food chain, pilot new product streams, target resources at new markets, enhance levels of productivity and competitiveness, and develop leadership positions across a range of sectors. In short, Leitrim Food Strategy directly responds to Food Harvest 2020's recommendation to invest in ideas, knowledge and skills, encourage innovation and creativity, and recognise new opportunities for collaboration across the food supply chain and with other competitors.

The recent adoption of Food Wise 2025 is equally apt for the Leitrim Food Strategy. Its long-term vision of international markets through smarter greener growth over the next decade. In keeping with The Leitrim Food Strategy vision, it foresees a sector that acts more strategically and achieves a competitive critical mass in

the international marketplace while targeting more quality conscious consumers who will recognise and reward Ireland's food producers for their sustainable production and high quality produce. We have also been careful to nurture an export focus as presented in Action 1.9. 'Local Roots Global Reach' is based on the continued development of the sector where efficient and environmentally-friendly production delivers sustainable export growth on global markets. At the core of the strategy is a focus on increasing access to

The Leitrim Food Strategy is also firmly strategically aligned to Bord Bia's new strategic plan for 2016 and beyond. It sits within the People, Producers and Infrastructure pillar which seeks to develop and nurture an environment where food producers and entrepreneurs can develop successful and sustainable businesses.

The North East North West Regional Action Plan for Jobs 2015- 2017 spotlights the strong agri-food sector in the Region. It recognises the vibrant food clusters, the depth of capabilities in established food companies, the region's natural resources and the opportunities presented by addressing changing consumer demands. They highlight that there is potential for further growth, with added value and increased productivity being key opportunities.



#### This can be achieved through:

- Food Innovation
- Tourism opportunities e.g Shannon-Erne Waterway Blueway as a recreational trail concept to include walking, heritage & food
- Enhanced product development and processing activities
- The production of higher value-add, specialist, locally produced food products.
- Food Festivals which emulate the success Taste of Cavan which has contributed enormously to raising awareness of the 'food offering' at both local and regional level

#### Actions within the North East North West Regional Action Plan for Jobs from which we draw influence:

- Action 63 Teagasc will work with other responsible bodies and regional stakeholders to develop food innovation programmes
- Action 64 Teagasc will deliver product development workshops in the region targeting the development of 20 new food enterprises and will support the development of an artisan food hub pilot project in the region based on international best practice of such hubs.
- Action 67 Target an increase in the number of participants on the Food Academy Programme and progress a number of companies in the region to the next level -Food Academy Advance.
- Action 68 Bord Bia to work with retailers to assist food and drink companies in the North East/ North West to increase shelf space for local produce.
- Action 69 Enterprise Ireland will target food companies in the North East/ North West to scale and innovate in line with National Policy.
- Action 73 InterTradeIreland will use its Fusion initiative (connecting HEIs in the region/nationally with innovative SMEs) to further develop innovation in agri-technology firms.

With all of this positive potential, now is the right time to take action to accelerate this growth and optimise the benefits that can flow on to our food businesses, residents and community. This strategy identifies the necessary actions to take to strengthen the food enterprise sector, yet it also acknowledges and addresses educational deficits in food in relation to health and making healthy local food as accessible as possible.

## A Thematic Approach

We now present our strategic focus and actions across 8 key themes which in many cases are cross cutting, each important to realise the overall impact we are working towards. The themes are:

**Theme One** Building Industry Strength  
**Theme Two** Sales & Routes to Market  
**Theme Three** Food Tourism  
**Theme Four** Food Innovation & New Product Development

**Theme Five** Education  
**Theme Six** Supporting Our Farmers and Growers  
**Theme Seven** Infrastructure  
**Theme Eight** Organics & Slow Food

# THEME ONE

## BUILDING INDUSTRY STRENGTH

The very foundation of our ambitious food strategy is building industry strength.

Our consultations verified a strong interest in the formation of a Taste Leitrim trade network to share experiences, create new connections and build the collective strength of the sector. Good things happen when we share our experiences, success, talent, and ingenuity. Professional camaraderie will be cultivated across the county and across our food chain.

*Meeting the judges of the Top Ten Foodie Destinations*



# THEME ONE

## BUILDING INDUSTRY STRENGTH

### 1.1 Directory and Sourcing Guide

To build trade awareness of who is who in the Leitrim food and drink ecosystem, we will develop and publish a directory of Leitrim producers as a practical guide for buyers and chefs when sourcing new food product.

As articulated by one consultee *'Getting to know our fellow producers and suppliers is vital. We are our own best customers! It's difficult to take time out of the business so unless I hear or read about a supplier I may not be aware of them and their work'*.

This will be printed and added to the Taste Leitrim website.

### 1.2 Network Development

Given the work completed in 2015 in developing the Taste Leitrim brand and some initial networking actions therein, it is opportune to build upon this work as the foundation for the overall strategy. It is opportune to convene all those with a connection to the Taste Leitrim initiative including producers, food service industry and retailers to join a Taste Leitrim network.

The Local Enterprise Office will support the development of the network through mentoring to facilitate its establishment. Based on a modest

annual fee of €50, the network will meet 3-4 times per year at alternating food establishments across the county for learning events, workshops and social activities.

Consultees also expressed an interest in an annual group visit to a strong food region. Best practice food networks in Ireland are

- Dublin Food Chain [www.dublinfoodchain.ie](http://www.dublinfoodchain.ie),
- Tipperary Food Producers [www.tipperaryfoodproducers.com](http://www.tipperaryfoodproducers.com) and
- the winners of the Top 10 Foodie Destination, the Boyne Valley Food Series [www.boynevalleyfoodseries.ie](http://www.boynevalleyfoodseries.ie).

To facilitate communication, a private Taste Leitrim Facebook page has been established to facilitate conversations and sharing information. A Whats App group will also be established.

### 1.3 Ambassador Programme

Ensuring the voice of the industry is to the fore, each year, 3 ambassadors/spokespeople will be appointed to champion Leitrim food and drink. Acting as key advocates and media contact points, they will be chosen on a cross country cross sector basis by a selection committee.



A series of actions have been designed to ...

## **PROMOTE ENTREPRENEURIAL INITIATIVE**

### **1.4 Mentor Bank**

During 2016, 24 clients with a food business/idea availed of 122 hours of mentoring expertise. In 2017, this allocation will increase to 150 mentoring hours for food businesses to build the strategic competence of Leitrim's food & drink producers and places to eat.

### **1.5 Start your own Food Business**

Start-ups businesses are the lifeblood of the economy and a powerful engine of job creation and economic growth. A dedicated training and mentoring Start your own Food Business programme will train 10 emerging food entrepreneurs per annum.

### **1.6 How to set up a Street Food Business**

The Food Hub, Drumshanbo is involved in Street Food Opportunities for Regions EU programme to support the development of a street food economy ([www.sfofr.com](http://www.sfofr.com)). Emerging Leitrim food entrepreneurs can avail of free online training on how to set up a street food business on a shoestring.

### **1.7 Supervalu Food Academy Programme**

The Supervalu, Bord Bia, LEO Food Academy programme has assisted growing Leitrim food companies to expand their sales through the Supervalu network. Delivered on a regional basis with Donegal and Sligo, Leitrim will assist 6 growth orientated Leitrim food entrepreneurs per annum to participate on the programme.

## **INVESTMENT CONDUITS**

### **1.8 Financial Supports**

Food companies in Leitrim have availed of Local Enterprise Office Priming Grants (for businesses established less than 18 months) and Business Expansion Grants. To resource growth, on an annual basis, they will allocate at least 20% of overall Priming Grants and 20% of Expansion Grants to the food sector (subject to eligible applications). High potential start-ups will also be encouraged to apply to the Enterprise Ireland HPSU programme, the Competitive Start Fund and the New Frontiers Programme where applicable.

### **1.9 Acceleration Funding**

We will investigate the opportunity to put together an investment fund to resource emerging and growing Leitrim food businesses. Accelerators can and do play a role in enhancing the start-up eco-system nationally and in supporting the early stage development of start-up companies leading to increased growth overtime. There have been predominant in the technology sector but no precedence for dedicated food fund accelerators in Ireland. We will convene stakeholders from the public and private sector to investigate setting up a dedicated investment fund. This will then be poised for supports for Accelerator developments which we anticipate will emerge in the lifetime of our Strategy.

## **STRENGTHEN EXPORT MARKET REACH**

In response to the vision of Food Wise 2025 of 'Local Roots Global Reach', we are putting export to the fore in terms of building industry strength, albeit we are working from a relatively low base. Actions designed to grow exports include: -

### **1.10 Food Export Support Programme**

We will investigate demand and seek resources for an export programme which will be mindful of the impact of Brexit. While engaging with Enterprise Ireland and Bord Bia, this programme would benefit from a regional approach with Donegal and Sligo. The goal is to assist 6 Leitrim food and drink businesses to work on a programme of activity which will assist them enter new export markets in Northern Ireland, UK and beyond. We see the programme as focusing on:

- Development of core skills to build export sales and turnover;
- To investigate routes to market including cross border and overseas
- To exhibit and market local produce at a range of popular industry and retail focused trade fairs and events in NI, UK and further afield.

### **1.11 Dealing with Brexit**

We will host a Brexit focus workshop for Leitrim's food and drink producers in collaboration with Enterprise Ireland and thereafter support companies through specialist mentoring.

### **1.12 Global Food Kitchen**

As mentioned, Leitrim is rooted in biodiversity and diversity and we are a real fusion of backgrounds and experiences. To embrace that diversity from all over the world, we want to nurture and bring to market the cultural diversity of food across the county. Initiatives under this action will include:-

- Run training courses for different ethnic cuisines
- Ensure that local ethnic food caterers are represented at local festivals and other food events.

Working with local ethnic restaurants to develop and promote recipes that combine local, seasonal ingredients with traditional cooking methods.

## THEME TWO

# SALES AND ROUTES TO MARKET

Recognised as one of the most challenging barriers to the growth of food companies, developing innovative distribution solutions is a key focus of this Strategy.



*Carrick-On-Shannon Farmers Market*



## THEME TWO

# SALES AND ROUTES TO MARKET

### TASTE LEITRIM FOOD SUPPLY CHAIN

Recognised as one of the most challenging barriers to the growth of food companies, developing innovative distribution solutions is a key focus of this Strategy. We are influenced by initial work done by the Upper Shannon Erne Future Economy project in establishing interest in a distribution model for local food producers to sell into the Dublin market. Of the 20 producers that engaged in a needs analysis, 14 are selling into the Dublin market using either their own van sales or by courier deliveries. This ranged from one drop to week to one drop per day and a mixture of chilled and ambient product. 8 of these producers were interested in a shared supply chain solution which would provide a combined sales, delivery and merchandising service into the Dublin market, emphasis on Dublin City with a smaller presence required inside the M50.

Several complementary actions are envisaged as part of our Strategy.

#### 2.1 Stimulating Local and Regional Markets

We will support the work of Leitrim's three farmer/country markets in Carrick on Shannon, Mohill and Manorhamilton through a development/mentoring programme to tackle the challenges and opportunities they face and introduce them to new ways to do business. For example, this would be as simple as a pre-order and fulfilment service for those who cannot physically attend the market. This would involve a modest investment in technology but opens up a whole new consumer base for the markets making them more sustainable and giving consumers access to the freshest produce. We will also guide them in instigating a joint mentoring programme to build trade and consumer awareness, increase marketing skills, identify innovative ways to increase footfall, new routes to market, a fresh focus on event planning and facilitate networking to increase co-operation between the markets

#### 2.2 Taste Leitrim Distribution Network

In Leitrim, we will facilitate 8 Leitrim food producers to combine to develop a smarter solution to this pressing challenge. They will establish a co-operative business model for shared distribution. We will support the identification of funds to employ a distribution agent to work with local producers to overcome barriers to distribution. The primary target is the Dublin market.

#### 2.3 Taste Leitrim Food Supply Hub

To facilitate Action 2.2, we will support the development of a dedicated unit to service the storage needs of distribution co-operative at The Food Hub.

#### 2.4 EU TRINNO Project

WestBIC, Northern and Western Regional Assembly supported by Cavan, Leitrim, Longford and Roscommon local authorities are working on an EU project to develop an action plan to examine the possibility of establishing a regional food distribution hub in the Upper Shannon Erne Future Economy region. The project is looking at the potential of:-

- Using existing food depots as regional food distribution hubs
- A Rural Social Scheme worker to do the packing in the food distribution hubs
- Developing a few distribution hubs across the west, south and east of Ireland all linked up

It is anticipated that the research element of this project will be complete by July 2017 which will inform the rest of the project.

## THE POWER OF DIGITAL

We have mentioned the potential for digital in some of the key actions of this proposal. We genuinely believe Leitrim can lead the way to digitise the local food economy and as part of our Strategy we are putting forward very achievable interventions that can make this happen for example:

- Online order fulfillment platform for the farmer's market (Action 2.1)
- Providing online sales platforms for a Taste Leitrim hamper
- Support the IT needs of Action 2.2 Taste Leitrim Distribution Network through a digital order mechanism
- Encouraging more food, drink and hospitality businesses to trade online and avail of LEO's Online Trading Voucher Scheme

### 2.5 Taste Leitrim Hamper

We will support the Taste Leitrim Food Supply Hub to bring together of a Taste Leitrim hamper for sale online and through retail channels within and outside the county. A Taste Leitrim hamper was instigated for Christmas 2015 by Mulvey's Giftware in Carrick on Shannon for sale through their own outlet and as a corporate gift. The Food Hub will compliment this action and build on same for year-long sales and will modify the [www.tasteleitrim.com](http://www.tasteleitrim.com) website to provide the online sales platform for variations of the Taste Leitrim hamper and support retail, corporate and wholesale channels for hamper sales. The Food Hub will also instigate a high impact online marketing campaign.

### 2.6 Online Trading Voucher

Since this scheme became available in 2014, 14 food related businesses have been approved an Online Trading Voucher representing a significant 25% of total investments. Local Enterprise Office will continue to make that commitment to food businesses and will work to maximise the number of food businesses and places to eat that can trade online.

# THEME THREE

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## FOOD TOURISM

The Guardian newspaper sums up the consumer's focus on food in an apt way.

*'Never before has our culture been so engaged in discussing and experimenting with and agonizing over and fantasizing about and planning and enjoying what is on the end of our forks...'*

Food tourism is simply described as the pursuit of unique and memorable eating and drinking experiences.

*The Shed Distillery by P. J. Rigney – Drumshanbo*





## THEME THREE

# FOOD TOURISM

Beyond restaurants, the culinary explorer is looking for discreet pockets of gastronomic excellence only the locals know about, the more authentic the better. This bodes well for Leitrim's compelling proposition which is full of character and diversity. Tourists want to immerse themselves in local culture through authentic food experiences. Food, hospitality and tourism businesses can provide food-based experiences to visitors, such as:

- guided food tours
- food trails
- festivals, markets and fairs
- tastings
- farm, factory or brewery tours
- food themed events

Theme 3 has been designed to benefit from ambitious targets outlined in the Growth Strategy for Tourism in Leitrim 2015-2021 to double the size of the tourism sector in Leitrim by 2021. This equates to a target of 296,000 tourists, who will spend €70 million per annum. That potential of tourism as an economic driver is also very clear in the 2014 report of the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA) which advocates for an innovative approach to the promotion and product development of tourism in rural areas. Their strategy, Energising Ireland's Rural Economy, focuses on a range of measures which are intended to support the economic regeneration of rural communities. They will be an important funding target for this Strategy. We are also influenced by and contributing to the SAINT project where Leitrim is taking on a leadership role in establishing the county as the key slow tourism destination in Ireland. Slow food is a major part of that experience as we outline in Theme 8.

While the Taste Leitrim project has put in place the initial marketing infrastructure to bring food tourism of the county to the fore, there is now a very compelling opportunity to build on this preparatory work to create a new and tangible stimulus.

### 3.1 Celebrate our Taste Leitrim Provenance

Build on the extensive work done by our restaurants and places to eat who committed to sourcing their produce locally. We will invest in a suite of branded Taste Leitrim marketing materials will be provided for places to eat to display with pride and emphasize to the public the local provenance of the produce..

### 3.2 Be More Visible

We will increase the visibility of Taste Leitrim across events, festivals and markets by providing branded Taste Leitrim point of sale pack for use at external events, festivals and road trips that our producers go on. The Taste Leitrim sign has already been used by the three Leitrim winners of John & Sally McKenna 100 Best Restaurants in Ireland (Shamzuri Hanifa, Piero Melis & Aisling Stone) and on a Malaysian visit by chefs John Kelly and Shamzuri Hanifa.



A Taste Leitrim merchandising and display pack will also be made available to agencies and producer groups to highlight the Leitrim connection.

### 3.3 Strengthen Leitrim's food events

Food festivals and events are the ultimate expression of a local food culture that bring culinary experiences beyond the bounds of a restaurant or food production unit. Food events reinforce the connection between local food and its celebration as part of our lifestyle. The Taste Leitrim festival calendar is peppered with events across the county, based on place such as Taste of Carrick or a locally prized product, such as The Potato Day event at Organic Centre, as part of Heritage Week. In 2017, we will provide resources to assist 3 key food events in the county, to the existing Taste of Carrick and 2 new food Taste Leitrim festivals in Drumshanbo and Rossinver. Thereafter, we will work to build a sustainability plan for each festival.

### 3.4 Build upon and publicise the 5 Taste Leitrim food trails

The Taste Leitrim virtual tour, launched in late 2015, is based on a series of 5 geographic trails and 2 thematic experiences (organics and the Leitrim Boxty Story), and encourages the visitor to plan varying culinary experiences in the county. The trails capture the individual offering and character of each trail:-

- **Carrick on Shannon:** Carrick on Shannon has a real food tourism buzz with an intriguing offering of 29 places to eat. From fine dining to award winning gastro pub food experiences to world cuisine offerings, Carrick on Shannon's waterside location provides a gorgeous backdrop to enjoy great food, made by engaging food producers. It was recently awarded the Purple Flag award, which recognises a vibrant and safe evening economy <https://youtu.be/gDzb6QZWV4>
- **North Leitrim Wild Atlantic Way:** To capture the spirit and environment of North Leitrim, you need to think sustainable, artistic, healthy and wholly natural. Leitrim may have the shortest coastline of any seaside county in Ireland, but it is a special part of the Wild Atlantic Way (the Wild Atlantic Butterfly Route). Dromahair, is a food destination in its own right boasts special places to eat while Rossinver is home to the Organic Centre, an iconic place to learn and experience food and sustainable living. Kinlough and Manorhamilton are firmly on the foodie map. Combine great producers, genuine hospitality and stunning scenery, this is special, this is Taste Leitrim. <https://youtu.be/STL2VPz0JF4>
- **Drumlin South Leitrim:** From award winning gastro food to afternoon tea at a Castle, South Leitrim is a microcosm of everything this is special about food in Leitrim. From an organic cafe to an iconic steakhouse; from a waterfront bistro to food at an angling heartland, the area of South Leitrim and its

*gentle rolling hills (drumlins) has a very special food offering. Carrigallen, Mohill and Dromod will intrigue you with their commitment to great food of real character. <https://youtu.be/Z0SJli8wGxg>*

- **Drumshanbo** - a hub of food: Drumshanbo has been at the heart of food production since 1935 (home to Bo Peep jams) and today has a strong community of independent food and drink producers – both in the Food Hub (imagine cheese, boxty, desserts, jams, brewing and the first distillery to open in Connaught in over 100 years under one roof) and it's hinterland (with bakers, organic farming and chocolate) – heaven! Fabulous places to eat complete the special Drumshanbo offering. - <https://youtu.be/pT2Y2mF9IUo>
- **Shannon Erne Blueway:** Running from Leitrim Village along the Shannon Erne Waterway to Ballinamore, the Taste Leitrim Blueway boasts a stunning offering of waterside pubs, restaurants and taverns. Charming villages and towns offer boating tourists, the active adventurers and the curious the best of home cooking, genuine and hearty food and welcoming hosts. <https://youtu.be/XTvrEdOMPM0>
- **Boxty - Place on a Plate:** When they say that local food is an integral part of our heritage and culture, they must have been thinking about boxty which must be as old as Leitrim itself! Let's be honest, boxty is a bit of a legend really. It even has its own Wikipedia page. <https://youtu.be/nE0MtqpJ2vM> . It is interesting that the Boxty Food Story is our most watched trail video.
- **Organic Leitrim:** Leitrim has a very strong organic food heritage boasting a cluster of organic farms and producers, Ireland's only Organic Farmers Coop and the multi-award winning Organic Centre which is a hub of food production, education, inspiration and advice. In recent years, the passion and drive of our organic food champions has culminated in their achievements in the National Organic Awards. Winners including the aforementioned Organic Centre as well as Blakes Always Organic, Bluebell Organic Farm. <https://youtu.be/hK7c8Hw9CsE>

Maps are available on [www.tasteleitrim.com](http://www.tasteleitrim.com) where the viewer can meet 59 food producers and places to eat in a video series. The potential of Taste Leitrim was recognised when the county reached the TOP 10 Foodie Destinations in the country 2016, a national competition ran by the Restaurants Association of Ireland. This was an impressive achievement for such a new initiative and the independent judges report is insightful:-

*'The Foodie Destinations of Ireland 2016 judging committee felt that Taste Leitrim's application and food destination offering was excellent, given the recently formed status of the group. It was particularly strong in the areas of Local Producers, Local Knowledge & Participation and Education & Training, all of which draw from many years of growth, development and playing to the strengths of the area. As a foodie destination, Leitrim offers both diversity of experience (as highlighted by the five trails) and a real sense of discovery, and it is great see these strengths being played to.'*

There are two key deliverables planned as part of this action:-

- Increase the businesses included on the virtual food trail to include farm visits and growers and provide an offline marketing resource for same
- Update the current Taste Leitrim digital trail and produce a Taste Leitrim trail brochure for widespread distribution.



### **3.5 Draw Benefit from the Wild Atlantic Way**

We will proactively link the North Leitrim Taste Leitrim trail with the Wild Atlantic Way project and work with the key stakeholders in North Leitrim to ensure advantage can be accrued.

### **3.6 Draw benefit from the Blueways**

Our Taste Leitrim Blueways food trail has a strategic fit within the wider development of the Blueways brand and visitor experience. Waterways Ireland actively promote hospitality through their Waterways Ireland Guide. They have retained a marketing company to research and pilot the redevelopment of their offering and the concept around the brand, for example outdoor activities that complement the waterways such as hiking, biking and walking and a food offering that fits with same e.g. gourmet sandwiches for picnics, heathy snack boxes etc.. Their research pilot will also examine the communication channels to inspire customers to take a trip on the waterways and enjoy food and again, the food experiences on offer.

We will continue to engage with Waterways Ireland to ensure that Leitrim's Blueways businesses are poised to contribute and take benefit from same.

### **3.7 Development of a new Culinary Tourism Experience**

We will support the development of a new culinary tourism experience unit at The Food Hub, the aim of which is to provide the tourist the opportunity to physically experience the food of the Leitrim and the wider region. It will provide a new and engaging visitor attraction based at The Food Hub, Drumshanbo. It will give tourists, be they individuals, families or groups a new all-weather visitor experience to enjoy. This is already happening on a small scale to Drumshanbo as food tours are currently promoted to Carrig Brewery and The Shed Distillery (first distillery to open in Connaught in 101 years) and in 2016 attracted a few thousand visitors with no promotion. The experience unit will operate on the basis of a pre-determined and timetabled programme which will be widely marketed to visitors. Using the skill base of the Taste Leitrim chefs and artisan producers, it will offer a series of artisan food masterclasses, so the tourist to learn a new skill e.g. cheese making, bread baking, boxty making, tasting experiences. Mintel tell us 24% of all holiday makers wish acquire a new skill on holidays. An indicative programme could look like:-

- Friday is The Boxty Story (using the Taste Leitrim video), a boxty making masterclass using a schedule of boxty makers throughout the county
- Thursday is Organic Leitrim – similarly using the video footage already produced but a masterclass with organic producers and champions and outreach to the Organic Centre, Rossinver
- Saturday – children's cookery classes (already run very successfully but the current kitchen space is the time share production kitchen is not wholly suitable)
- Sunday – masterclass in craft beer and cheese
- Other key events would include
  - Heritage food events linking with key visitor attractions including Arigna Mining Experience
  - Global food kitchen events which would see different nationalities take over the kitchen for a day to prepare and share their native cuisine. The Food Hub and the

Leitrim Development Company did this very successfully with the Polish and African communities. The power of food to unite and integrate people and new communities cannot be overestimated.

- One very interesting theme that emerged from the Taste Leitrim project is that many and talented chefs have chosen to make Leitrim their home and their business base. From all over the world (Malaysia to France, Estonia to Hungary) our chefs and food producers will be invited to host an event that connects us to their home cuisine.

This project will also compliment and add value to The Shed Distillery's recently announced plans to invest in a new visitor centre at their Food Hub location and their inclusion in the national Irish Whiskey Trail which is expected to attract 1.9 million visitors by 2025. Importantly, transportation options will be provided and tours timed to coincide with the Local Link timetable. Evening events will also add to the night time economy. Working with others in the tourism sector (and particularly the Leitrim Blueways initiative), the new culinary tourism destination unit will develop links and tourism products combining outdoor activities, healthy living/lifestyle and locally produced food.

Modest targets have been set for the project:-

- 20 food producers, farmers and chefs will earn addition income through running masterclasses
- Attracting 400 visitors per week in high season and 200 visitors per week in low season, we forecast year 1 visitor numbers of over 15,000 in year one
- 1 new visitor attraction will be added to the regional tourism offering with an engaging calendar of events and things to do
- Increase awareness of the provenance of local foods

### **3.8 Produce and Widely Circulate a Calendar of Food Tourism Events in the County**

To really deliver on the food experience product, we will encourage producers and places to eat to each put forward at least one event per annum for inclusion in a well marketed event calendar. We will collate information and publish (both online and in the printed food trail brochure) an annual calendar of events.

Examples put forward as part of our consultations include: -

- Ballroom of Romance event in Glenfarne to include food tastings (recipes from the 1950s), music, tied in with the history of the centre, the history of food, talks, workshops, and bus tour- food safari and visit to small suppliers around the Kiltyclogher/ Glenfarne area
- Big Day out- activities on Lough Melvin, lunch at Grassroof café, bike trip on to Kinlough, evening meal at the Courthouse

### **3.9 Support Leitrim's Boxty Producers**

We commit to support the work underway in pursuing PGI status for boxty as a regional speciality. In addition to the PGI application, we will give increased prominence to The Leitrim Boxty Story through digital marketing and work with the producers to play a key role in Action 3.7.

## THEME FOUR

# FOOD INNOVATION AND NEW PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

A consistent theme running through Leitrim's food offering is health and well-being. Innovation through health provides a point of difference, a driver of growth and an opportunity to enhance profitability. In Leitrim, there is a natural focus on natural, right across our producers which this Theme will support in a more planned way. From kefir to bakers using rapeseed oils and a wide spectrum of organic products, there is a real commitment to health and functional foods.

*The Courthouse Restaurant, Kinlough - Freshly picked sea urchins on the doorstep...on Wild Atlantic Way near Bundoran...!*



## THEME FOUR

# FOOD INNOVATION AND NEW PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Consumers are demanding better-tasting and more nutritious food in more convenient formats and packaging; they want food that fits with their changing lifestyles that is affordable and trustworthy. However, Bord Bia confirm that the innovation capability for most Irish food businesses is a weakness and needs to be enhanced and supported. It is vital that we support our food Leitrim businesses to recognise, anticipate and grow from changing consumer demands, increase food innovation and new product development. This can be achieved through closer liaison with the higher education sector. Developing closer links with NUIG St. Angela's should be a priority, while building on Sligo IT's linkage with Leitrim and The Hive should be levered to make impact in the food sector. Athlone IT and Letterkenny IT do a lot of work with the hospitality sector and are knowledge providers for the Enterprise Ireland Innovation Voucher programme.

### 4.1 Support for Innovation and Niche Product Development

To strengthen Leitrim's focus on healthy food innovation, we will bring together the innovators in healthy food in the county to plan and seek resources for a support programme of R&D support, routes to market and marketing tools required to bring that product to a national launch. The group shall also link with Teagasc and Bord Bia's Thinking House which provides a shared resource for all Irish food and drink firms, free access to the latest robust market data, a deep understanding of current and possible future international trends and a high-tech facility for consumer discussion groups.

### 4.2 Develop Link with Leitrim Recreation Forum

We will seek collaborative opportunities and resources to link Leitrim food into the recreation strategy and unpin the outdoor recreation product with a fitting food offering. This will involve an examination of the linkages and opportunities that can be realised between outdoor activities, healthy living/lifestyle and locally produced food

### 4.3 Graduate Work Placement Programme for Food and Hospitality Sector

We will seek to broker a work placement programme between Institute of Technologies and NUIG St. Angela's students and food companies. This initiative will build on the work of the Graduate Internship for Entrepreneurship Programme (USEFE) to facilitate food companies engaging a graduate in their business.

## BUILD TECHNICAL CAPACITY

It is essential that our food companies and their employees benefit from industry-focused technical training. Our training needs consultations highlighted the need to deliver the following programmes.

### 4.4 Introduction to Food Hygiene Industry Training

### 4.5 HACCP Food Hygiene Industry Training



#### **4.6 Assist Companies Apply for Innovation Vouchers**

Our sectoral focus on innovation will stimulate new development plans with a resulting increase the number of applications from Leitrim food and drink companies to the Enterprise Ireland Innovation Voucher scheme.

#### **4.7 BRC Global Standard Food Safety Programme**

To support our export initiatives (actions 1.10 – 1.12) we will investigate demand for a regional BRC Global Standard Food Safety programme. BRC accreditation is vital for exporting businesses as it is often a fundamental requirement of leading retailers. Our initial target will be to assist 6 Leitrim food and drink businesses to achieve BRC Global Standard Food Safety standard and subject to demand, this will be repeated on a bi-annual basis.

#### **4.8 Waste Minimisation and Greening Programme**

We will encourage Leitrim food companies to participate in the Bord Bia Origin Green programme. We will also investigate potential to deliver a food sector environmental programme and will design and source funding for a cross cutting programme to include topics such as

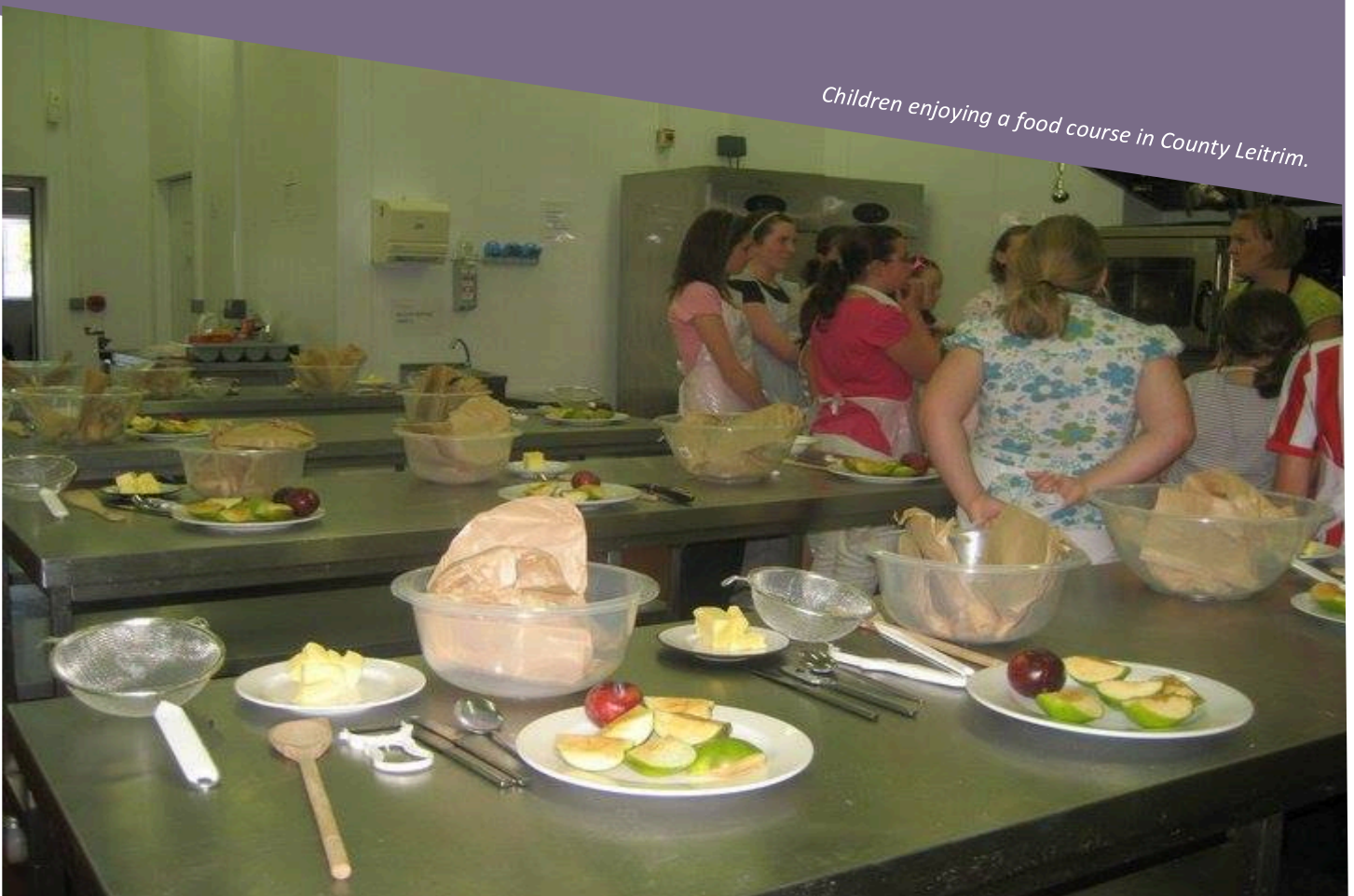
- Minimise waste, including portion control and effective food storage;
- Packaging reductions and recycling;
- Greater business responsibility for waste production; a strong emphasis on waste composting; and
- Turning waste into energy, bio-gas and anaerobic digestion
- Our consultation meeting came up with a simple waste reduction idea - sharing food stock surplus through a Whatsapp or Facebook group. At consumer level Leitrim County Council play a key role in food waste reduction and previously ran an innovative Food Rescue event.

## THEME FIVE

# EDUCATION, DEVELOPING A FOOD CULTURE

Weaving an education focus right through our Leitrim Food Strategy has been a purposeful undertaking. While education and upskilling are foundations across all themes, Theme Five will specifically support actions for youth, build leadership in our voluntary and community groups and empower our network of educators. It will also support the professional development of hospitality and food service staff.

*Children enjoying a food course in County Leitrim.*



## THEME FIVE

# EDUCATION, DEVELOPING A FOOD CULTURE

Theme 5 has formatted measures to stimulate training for business and quality of life enhancement through the medium of food.

### 5.1 Food Education Programme (Youth)

It is important for us to give children and young people opportunities to take part in practical food experiences (including cooking and growing food), and to learn about food and food choices. We will design and seek resources (both public funding and a corporate sponsor) for a programme to engage with primary and secondary schools and youth groups to facilitate:

- Visits to farms, food producers and hospitality businesses - this could be done as part of a Taste Leitrim Food Education Week, a well-publicized programme of interactive and stimulating events
- Practical cooking sessions with chefs and producers so that they become knowledgeable and creative about their food, about how it was produced and how it was prepared
- Linking our chefs and producers into the local schools to do one educational workshop per year per school
- Encourage Leitrim national schools to participate in the GIY Sow & Grow initiative which enables primary school children to learn how to grow vegetables in the classroom. The children not only learn the science of growing, they also experience the joy of growing and eating their own food. GIY calls this "Food Empathy" a deeper connection with food, which is proven to lead to a healthier life long-term.
- Encourage young people involved in the Young Entrepreneurs Programme to undertake a food business and link with our Farmers Markets and retailers as their sales platforms.

### 5.2 Enhance citizen and consumer empowerment through Better Knowledge

We will support the critical role of voluntary and community groups to establish food projects and encourage participation from those that are challenged and under-represented. It is acknowledged that two of biggest challenges facing the EU food sector are obesity and food poverty. To ensure the voluntary and community groups are equipped to play a leadership role, through mentoring, we will upskill and attract resources for voluntary and community organisations to instigate pilot projects such as

- Community growing initiatives – both formal and informal
- Community supported agriculture and box schemes
- Initiatives that make sustainable and affordable food products accessible to all communities
- Empower people in the community to work with families through exercise, nutrition, food
- Look at the good use of schools' and community centres' kitchens for community training.

Actions will be encouraged across the county which will be appropriate to the needs of that community. One such project in this action will be a focus on Mohill, area challenged by lack of employment. While it is part of the Taste Leitrim Drumlin Trail for South Leitrim but has just two entries but interesting things are happening in

Mohill. The old secondary school kitchen is being renovated by the Education & Training Board who will provide cookery and food health education courses for adults. Leitrim County Council secured funding under the REDZ programme to extend the training offering to children with a pilot training and awareness project around food and the benefits of healthy eating. This will involve a collaboration with chefs in the area, the Country Markets and the Community Garden (the youth cafe is growing their own vegetables in the community garden). The community are also embarking on a vegetable allotment project with a local authority housing estate. This project will run as a 6-month pilot with a review and evaluation leading to additional funding applications to the relevant sources e.g. HSE. As indicative outputs, we envisage 30 children will enjoy an engaging education series led by local chefs, leading to changed habits and skills levels of the children. Other communities in the county will be encouraged and facilitated to champion projects in their own areas.

The Strategy will also link with Leitrim Sports Partnership to investigate joined up initiatives around healthy eating/lifestyle and fitness.

### **5.3 Convene a Network of Food Educators in the County**

Leitrim is blessed with outstanding food educators so this action seeks to bring together those involved in food education of all forms including the Organic Centre, Rossinver, the National Organic Training Skillnet, St Georges Cookery School, The Food Hub, the Horticulture (with Eco-Tourism) course in Lough Allen Centre, Drumshanbo, Co. Leitrim, Leitrim Organic Farmers, Diggs Beekeeping Club and private providers together with the key funders of education and upskilling Mayo, Sligo, Leitrim Education and Training Board, Department of Social Protection, Leitrim Development Company, Local Enterprise Office, Teagasc, Skillnets, SOLAS and others. The objective of this network will be to

- Share experiences and identify provision gaps in both formal (all levels of QQI) and informal learning
- Effect greater co-ordination and higher impact marketing of professional and vocational skill courses
- Produce a county wide pathways programme that will bring a person from a Level 2 QQI course right through to access to formal education.
- Link with the food and hospitality employers in the county for quality work placement provision

### **5.4 Professional and Vocational Training**

The very foundation of a strong food tourism economy is a supply of qualified hospitality and food service staff. At the front line of a region's food tourist offering, they are fundamental to the success of the food sector. On the other hand, high numbers of our young unemployed population lack opportunities. Sub actions in this theme are: -

- Support the work of The Food Hub to expand the existing Professional and Vocational Training course provision. Since 2010, 144 unemployed people have graduated from The Food Hub's 42-week Hospitality Operations QQI accredited course funded jointly by Department of Social Protection, SOLAS & Leitrim Development Company. The ETB have provided a very interesting breakdown of the success of the course to date. Based on the delivery of 8 courses since 2010, progression rates have been recorded as:-



	Employment	Full Time Education
2010	50%	25%
2011	65%	10%
2012	70%	5%
2013	75%	5%
2014	75%	10%
2015	80%	10%
2016	85%	5%

As a very tangible sign of growth of the local hospitality sector, last year 85% of the course participants used this professional development to progress a career in the culinary sector, both as employees or as new food entrepreneurs. 5% have progressed to further education. Over 20 Leitrim and regional food and hospitality businesses provide valuable work experience for the participants and have proven to be excellent employers. They are clear that this wish this programme to continue. For a county, the size of Leitrim, this has a huge impact. Mayo, Sligo & Leitrim Education Training Board also run Nutrition and Healthy Options course and a Short Order Cooking course, both QQI Level 3. Last year 80 people participated in these courses.

Through the aforementioned network (action 5.3), ensure that other training providers in the county are supported to expand the existing Professional and Vocational Training course provision.

- The professional development of our chefs and hospitality staff is also an important consideration. Attracting and retaining talent is a priority for all our hospitality businesses. Some measures in this theme are:
  - Encourage a staff swap with another business for the benefit of the staff and their work experience
  - Conduct a needs analysis with employers and feed this information back into the educator's network

## THEME SIX

# SUPPORTING OUR FARMERS AND GROWERS

From beef and lamb to heritage orchards, snails, quails, mushrooms, honey and abundant organics, Leitrim farming is a rich and diverse celebration of produce despite significant areas of marginal land. Caring for our environment and our people, Leitrim is playing a leadership role in the development of social farming.

The process of developing this Strategy has unveiled a wealth of farmers, growers, and producers who should be added to the Taste Leitrim initiative through the trails, the website, on video and in promotional material. They are true champions of food and deserve our recognition and support.

*Bee Hive – Digges Beekeeping Society, Mohill, County Leitrim*



## THEME SIX

# SUPPORTING OUR FARMERS AND GROWERS

As we set out in our introduction to this Strategy, that much talked about link from the primary producer to the producer to the plate is at the heart of who we are and what we do. From beef to heritage orchards, snails, quails and abundant organics, Leitrim farming is a rich and diverse celebration of produce despite significant areas of marginal land. As outlined in the Local Economic and Community Plan for Co. Leitrim, the agriculture sector is challenged by smaller, fragmented farms and the ageing profile of farmers. The majority of the farms in the county are less than 20 hectares in size focusing on beef production and sheep farming in the more remote and upland areas and are owned by farmers over 65 years old.

Some 6,650 people are engaged in farming in the county, almost all on their own family farm, however there are few full time commercial farmers. The Teagasc Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal Strategic Plan 2015- 2020 and our consultation with Teagasc outlined that Leitrim livestock farming is primarily suckler farming (animals intended for beef) that are reared on the cow and then typically sold as weanlings in the autumn. With one in ten workers in Leitrim involved in the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector, it is interesting that Western Development Commission report 'exceptionally strong growth in self-employment in the Western Region since 2012, increasing by +31.1% in the region compared with +7.2% in the rest of the state'. Critical to this Strategy, the sectors they highlight with self-employment growth are Agriculture and Accommodation & Food Service. The Local Economic and Community Plan for Co. Leitrim has targeted an increase of 20% of farmers involved in value-added agriculture by 2021.

Given the scale of Leitrim farms, smallholders are numerous and need support. This Strategy concurs with the County Leitrim Local Development Strategy (LDS) for the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 (LEADER) Plan which has prioritises working in collaboration with other agencies supports and assistance are required to enable farmers to diversify and utilise their farm resources for non-agricultural activities. The challenges faced in smallholder development include inadequate knowledge of sustainable and efficient production practices, limited access to responsible supply chains and a lack of affordable finance.

Our consultations report a need for a spectrum of supports from three phase electricity to product development guidance. Supports are currently provided through the Leitrim Organic Farmers Coop and previously through Leitrim Development Company and their Smallholders Committee. In the past, there was a role for a part time support worker but this role is now provided by Leitrim Organic Farmers Coop. Our consultees also referenced a very helpful small grant scheme (typically €300 to €1,000) that was in place. 'The smallholder needs to have this support put back in place and have a voice to channel their ideas and concerns through.'

The meat supply chain in Leitrim is quite strong – there are six marts in the county, six abattoirs and two meat wholesalers who support the local livestock sector. Leitrim Development Company supported 4 abattoirs to participate in Meat Matters -Thriving Rural Abattoirs programme to respond to a national concern for smaller abattoirs and meat processing facilities who struggle independently to maintain a viable and sustainable business base. Early development work was done on developing an abattoir brand, the Master Meat Circle.

Leitrim is synonymous with the organic sector and plays a national leadership role which we will explore in Theme 8. Leitrim Organic Farmers Coop was established in 1998 to develop markets for its members produce and providing education and training. They are currently reviewing the potential for local fruit production for both direct supply but also for the drink companies in the county. The Organic Centre, Rossinver has played a critical role in assisting horticulture businesses establish and grow.

#### **6.1 Smallholders Support Programme**

Globally, smallholders produce about 70 per cent of the world's food. We will adopt measures to support Leitrim Organic Farmers Coop and Leitrim Development Company to ensure local smallholders are supported to diversify, add value and grow their businesses.

The wonderful diversity of small holders is an opportunity for Leitrim and should be embraced as part of Action 1.1. the Directory and all Taste Leitrim marketing actions. Including quails in Fenagh, snails in Ballinamore and the other smallholders will contribute to an interesting and compelling supply base in the county.

#### **6.2 Abattoirs**

To strengthen the sustainability of Leitrim's 6 abattoirs and 2 Leitrim meat wholesalers, we will build on Leitrim Development Company's work in training Leitrim's abattoirs through specific mentoring. The Leitrim County Vet advocates for 'locally-produced' branding for local abattoirs. The message that the meat is locally sourced, the animals are humanely slaughtered and the meat is an Artisan product should be promoted more. We will investigate rekindling the Master Meat Circle branding in the context of Taste Leitrim.

#### **6.3 Horticulture**

Support Leitrim's growers to add value to their produce by signposting and encouraging them to avail of supports outlined in Theme Four Food Innovation and New Product Development.

#### **6.4 Bees**

Digges Beekeeping Club was founded in 2009 by a group of experienced beekeepers based around Fenagh in South Leitrim. They now have 70 members and run a well-attended bee keeping course in Teagasc, Mohill over a 10-week period. In addition to running courses, they visit schools and community centres to teach the art of beekeeping. Supports required include enhancing the website to incorporate video and advise and access to finance for developing the retail range.

#### **6.5 Encourage the Local Fruit Farming Industry**

Support the work of Leitrim Organic Farmers Coop as they review the potential for local fruit production for both direct supply but also for the drink companies in the county.

#### **6.6 Social Farming**

Social farming is a relatively new concept in the world of agriculture and social service provision, and involves the use of traditional farm services as a form of therapy for those availing of social services. Leitrim Development Company opened a Social Farming Office in 2015 with the assistance of the Department of Agriculture Food & the Marine and the CEDRA Fund. It builds on the highly successful Social Farming Across Borders (SoFAB) Project. Having proven the concept locally, it now plays a national role in providing advice and guidance to farmers /farm families throughout Ireland who wish to establish social farming services and assistance in the development of service users and their families' understanding of the potential and delivery of social farming services. We will support their important work.



# THEME SEVEN

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## INFRASTRUCTURE

Leitrim has led the way in proving the immense potential of a food incubator as a driver of the local economy. They provide the vital infrastructure and supports for food entrepreneurs and agri diversification businesses to start and grow their food businesses. Beyond vital capacity, we recognise the need to provide advisory services and an innovative stimulus fund that would be open to the community and private sector.

*The Food Hub, Drumshanbo, County Leitrim*



## THEME SEVEN

# INFRASTRUCTURE

The Food Hub, Drumshanbo is very much at the heart of the impetus for the growth of the Leitrim food and drink sector. Dating back to 1935 and home to Bo Peep jams, today it is a strong community of independent food and drink producers – both in the Food Hub (imagine cheese, boxty, desserts, jams, brewing and the first distillery to open in Connaught in over 100 years under one roof) and its hinterland (with bakers, organic farming and chocolate). This is clear evidence that a very strong food business start-up culture is attracted to region as a result of The Food Hub resource and an impressive number of other food businesses have also chosen Drumshanbo as their business base. It is a nationally recognized flagship project that has delivered on its mission to provide significant multi company employment in the food sector– now supporting 70+ jobs, all positive, but! It is at full capacity; tenant companies want to grow further and are curtailed and new entrants cannot be facilitated.

To address the chronic shortage of food production workspace units in the area (The Food Hub currently has a waiting list in place and new opportunities are being lost), this Strategy proposes to put in place an innovative stimulus fund that would be open to the community and private sector. They can apply to secure small scale funds develop additional assets to increase the supply of food production and distribution space for emerging producers to base and grow within the zone. This stimulus fund will be designed to provide primer funding for underutilized buildings that could be transformed into food incubators (subject to a rigorous application and approval process). Acting as a priming stimulus, we are confident it will encourage and leverage significant community and private sector investment in the provision of addition food incubation facilities. This builds upon Action 1.9 Acceleration Funding and the establishment of a dedicated investment fund. Example projects include a public private partnership to develop a second The Food Hub site. A consortium of interests is investigating the potential of acquiring and developing a second food incubator site. The consortium has very interesting plans to lever funds through Crowd Funding – used extensively in the UK. This endeavor advocates for and reflects the UK strategy to develop Food Enterprise Zones<sup>1</sup> (there is no such offering in Ireland).

There are two key actions proposed in this theme: -

### 7.1 Increase Supply of Food Production Space in the County

Develop the county as a Food Enterprise Zone with a strong pipeline of food production facilities. The first step in this action is to commission a technical and financial feasibility study to ascertain innovative business models (e.g. public private partnership) that will provide the resources for the realisation of the project. This will include how to lever funds through Crowd Funding, tenants as investors e.g. prepayment of rent and other public private formulas.

### 7.2 Increase Trade Knowledge of the Supports Available to Establish and Grow their Businesses.

Our consultation revealed that 1 in 3 Leitrim food businesses have plans to expand. To support these businesses, we will provide an investment signposting and grant advisory service in the form of a bi-monthly external mentoring service to be made available to those with development plans. Linkage into Action 1.8 Acceleration Funding will be supported.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/second-round-of-food-enterprise-zones-created-to-drive-growth>

# THEME EIGHT

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## ORGANICS AND SLOW FOOD

Leitrim is synonymous with the organic sector and plays a national leadership role in same. We are also making strides to establish the county as **the** key slow tourism destination in Ireland. Research shows that the slow tourism niche market is high end, consumers are not price sensitive; instead want a quality product that delivers on its promise. That is the very essence of the Leitrim food experience.





## THEME EIGHT

# ORGANICS AND SLOW FOOD

Bord Bia tells us that latest figures from Kantar Worldpanel, released in late 2016, indicate a significant upturn for the Irish organic sector with a year on year increase of 23.7% to bring the total value of organic grocery sales to €142 million. Bord Bia run the National Organic Awards with seven different award categories. In 2016, two Leitrim food businesses were among the top seven, The Organic Centre, Rossinver, won Best Fresh Product Award for its Organic Salad Bag, a while the Best Prepared Product Award went to Drumshanbo's Blake's Always Organic for its Culture Blend Coffee.

Leitrim's organic credentials go back to the 1990s. The Organic Centre, Rossinver founded in 1995 on a 19 acres site in Rossinver, Co. Leitrim while Leitrim Organic Farmers Coop was established in 1998 to develop markets for its members produce and providing education and training. The Organic Centre has adopted "Growing Forward" as its theme for 2017 and that is very much the ethos of Theme 8 Organics and Slow Food.

More than the impressive infrastructure asset it is, The Organic Centre is a movement to educate in adopting a more sustainable lifestyle. It is a trailblazer organisation, and offers over 100 short courses ranging from gardening, food production and healthy cooking to crafts and renewable energy. Participants come from all over Ireland and some from abroad. Their major events throughout the year are our Annual Potato Day in March, The Garden Party in July and a Harvest Festival and Apple Day in September but other key events that have attracted national attention include the first Irish Fermentation Festival held in 2016. They also provide information and training for commercial growers and farmers, a full time one-year QQI level 5 horticultural training course and educational tours for schools, community groups and garden clubs. pen at weekends for course participants and the public. It can also cater for groups by arrangement and can be hired for outside catering.

Leitrim Organic Farmers Coop is used as a best practice example across Europe. It is included in Arc2020, a platform of 160+ organisations working for better food, farming environment and rural policies for Europe. Their description of the Coop is interesting... *'The Leitrim Organic Farmers Co-op does a rare thing in Ireland: it brings livestock farmers together as a group. It gets good prices for members, help farmers learn and work together for mutual benefit, all the while producing certified organic meat without agri-industrial inputs. They manage to do this in one of the most marginalised parts of Ireland, the so-called BMW – border, midlands west – region. This is Ireland's region with the poorest land, harshest climate and least economic investment. And this makes the agroecological story of one of Ireland's only farmer cooperatives all the more inspiring'.*

The Coop works closely with local organic marts and established the first organic sale in conjunction with Drumshanbo Mart in 2000. In 2016, the mart hosted 8 organic marts. It is clear that farmers need to evolve from stand along farming to becoming food producers. Including more farmers on the Taste Leitrim trail and supporting the farmer to market education, field walks and farm visits. Under the EU Innovation Partnership funding stream, the Coop submitted an application for the development of a public trail all around the Lough Allen Loop. This walking trail would employ local farmers to lead walks and talks as people circumnavigate the lake.



Leitrim is also taking on a leadership role in establishing the county as **the** key slow tourism destination in Ireland. Research shows that the slow tourism niche market is high end, consumers are not price sensitive; instead want a quality product that delivers on its promise. This Strategy is influenced by and contributing to the SAINT project. Funded under the EU INTERREG Northern Periphery and Arctic programme, the SAINT project is transferring learning and innovation from the 6 other countries involved in the project: Norway, Finland Sweden, Scotland, Iceland and Northern Ireland. Leitrim represents Ireland in this programme because of its rural location, unspoilt landscape and waterways. Business will be assisted to capitalise on the business opportunities in guided 'slow adventure' experiences, offering simple, nature-based, immersive journeys and in methodologies to extended marketing reach to lucrative customer segments. Slow food is a major part of that experience.

The actions that will contribute to this Theme are:-

#### **8.1 Supporting Fair Trade and other Ethical Trading Schemes**

Encourage businesses and institutions to stock fair trade products including public sector.

#### **8.2 Increase visibility of organic farming (marketing)**

Include organic farmers on the Taste Leitrim food trails & encourage farmer- education, field walks, farm visits.

#### **8.3 Increase visibility of organic farming (event)**

We will launch a new Leitrim Organic Week. This new event will build on the organic reputation of Leitrim and provide a celebration opportunity to focus the wider health and wellbeing credentials of the county. It will see a weeklong festival of events and the inclusion of special organic dishes on menus throughout the county.

#### **8.4 Draw Benefit from and Contribute to Leitrim Tourism's involvement in the Slow Tourism project SAINT**

We will support SAINT's work to promote local foods, traditional gastronomy and food production and encourage the farming of plants, seeds and livestock characteristic of the local ecosystem.

#### **8.5 Support the Work of North West Slow Food**

Support the work of this community of small food producers, farmers, educators, businesses, and foodies in the Sligo, Leitrim & Donegal area.

#### **8.6 International Linkages**

International linkages will be encouraged. An opportunity to link with the University of Gastronomic Sciences and Slow Food Università di Scienze Gastronomiche in Italy will be investigated.

# MAKING IT HAPPEN

This Strategy is the platform to amplify the voices of all those involved in food in the county. We have sought out simple-to-execute measures that will make a marked difference to the food economy of Co. Leitrim by 2021. More jobs, more informed and healthier citizens, more exports, more vibrancy in our communities, more awareness of Leitrim as an innovative and trailblazing food county, more visitors enjoying and talking about our food, and more economic return for all those investing in their businesses and working so hard within same.

We will be accountable to our Strategy, with 6-monthly reviews across our 8 Themes and 54 Actions.



## RESOURCING THE FOOD STRATEGY

Some of the resources to make this Strategy a reality is already in place. For example, Leitrim County Council was successful in securing funding through the Rural Economic Development Zones (REDZ) Programme 2016 Application for Medium Scale Project funding in late 2016) and their previous success in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine pilot programme for Agri-food related Tourism Initiatives in the Local Authorities as part of the Rural Innovation and Development Fund under the CEDRA report in late 2015. Both these funds, and others, will be targeted in the future to provide vital extra resources.

Our Strategy provides the basis across our 54 Actions will be the focus of new forthcoming funding applications and we are confident, that with the support of the trade and all the agencies and communities we will be successful. We will also work to support all food related businesses, communities and organisations to attract funds in their own right. This goes beyond public funds to include innovative approaches to public private partnership and crowdfunding.

Leitrim County Council will fulfil its responsibility is to act to pursue the vision and interests of our community and provide civic leadership. In this regard, Leitrim County Council will act in a range of roles, for example as a regulator, service provider, leader, advocate, facilitator, or manager.

## START WITH THE BRAND

Introduced in late 2015, the Taste Leitrim brand embodies the feedback of our makers and growers which are constant themes across the 59 meet the maker videos developed for the virtual food trail.

- We're a collective of happy people. We're proud and passionate people. We're passionate about the business of food and hospitality and where we do it.
- We are people's people. We care about our customers and enjoy their company and are grateful for their patronage
- We invite you to taste Leitrim, the world and everything that Leitrim has to offer.

The Taste Leitrim brand is rooted in biodiversity & combines culinary excellence with passion. This is implicated through the use of the chopping board in the Taste Leitrim logo which features the beautiful heart from the Leitrim Tourism logo. Much more than a name and an image, the brand also includes a powerful marketing message as "Taste Leitrim" is a call to action. Taste Leitrim is an invitation, a request that encourages people to come and taste what Leitrim has to offer.

To date, the brand has been used as a fresh and joined up marketing initiative for County Leitrim which:

- Has created a powerful customer focused brand to communicate the very best food and drink experiences and the world of choice that can be enjoyed in Leitrim
- Has built a marketing engine (our website, virtual trails, and Taste Leitrim videos) which have firmly established the county as a go-to food destination in Ireland

- Utilises low cost but innovative marketing tools to promote the Taste Leitrim brand and ensure maximum reach of our brand message and marketing materials
- Encourages solidarity amongst food and drink producers in Leitrim. The Taste Leitrim Food Trails will bring producers together in a shared marketing opportunity

The Food Hub has played a caretaker role in maintaining the marketing channels in 2016 but there is need for a more intense and consistent level of activity in the period of this plan. In addition to the key actions included in Theme 1 and Theme 3:

- The Taste Leitrim Directory and Sourcing Guide (Action 1.1)
- Network development activities (Action 1.2)
- Ambassador Programme (Action 1.3)
- Suite of branded Taste Leitrim point of sale materials for places to eat to display with pride. (Action 3.1)
- Increase the visibility of Taste Leitrim across events, festivals and markets by providing branded Taste Leitrim point of sale pack for use at external events, festivals and road trips that our producers go on. A Taste Leitrim merchandising and display pack will also be made available to agencies and producer groups (Action 3.2)

## MARKETING WITH GUSTO

Introduced in late 2015, the Taste Overarching marketing actions that are required include:

### **DIGITAL** Update the Taste Leitrim website

The Taste Leitrim website [www.tasteleitrim.com](http://www.tasteleitrim.com) has served the project well as a starting point but an update of same is required to place greater visibility to our digital content. Enhancement measures should include: -

- Commission new videos of key new entrants and extend this to our smallholder farmer producers. Why video? Video provides a much more entertaining experience; we see how the food is cooked, the noise and heat of the kitchen, we see the behind the scenes of the chef in action and get to meet those that manage the business. Viewers can see first-hand how the produce is grown, packaged, plated while gaining a sense of the atmosphere of each culinary establishment.
- Make the videos more prominent on the site
- Add ecommerce to the website to allow for sales of the Taste Leitrim hamper
- Increase linkages to and from the site with the Taste Leitrim businesses
- Add a significant food education sector to the website
- Add a significant events sector to the website
- Facilitate our producers to write a regular guest blog on the site

### **DIGITAL** Social Media Channels

Facebook has been the predominant social media tool used for the Taste Leitrim brand to date. With a following of 2,069 people, the Taste Leitrim Facebook page is performing well but needs to be ramped up. Likewise, we need to improve our Twitter activity, ideally through the Taste Leitrim Ambassadors and establish an Instagram account. The use of the Taste Leitrim hashtag by so many has been really encouraging since the launch of the brand, building on the strength and reach of #tasteleitrim will be a constant theme in the lifetime of this Strategy.



## PUBLIC RELATIONS

Public Relations is an important focus of Taste Leitrim. Good PR influences audience behaviours and ultimately achieves our goal to inspire others to visit the dining options available in Leitrim and to become as passionate about the food and the county as we are. Taste Leitrim has become to “go to” point of contact for foodie news in the county. For example, we have worked with Georgina Campbell to provide content and research into an impressive spread in the Food & Wine Magazine November 2016. Our Taste Leitrim ambassadors is a new initiative in this area and will ensuring the voice of the industry is to the fore, each year, 3 ambassadors/spokespeople will be appointed to champion Leitrim food and drink. Acting as key advocates and media contact points, they will be chosen on a cross country cross sector basis by a selection committee. They will build on and create linkages with food writers and bloggers for the benefit of all our food community.

# SUMMARY TABLE OF ACTIONS

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THEME ONE	BUILDING INDUSTRY STRENGTH				WHO	WHEN
	ACTION	OBJECTIVE	DETAIL			
1.1	Taste Leitrim Trade Directory and Sourcing Guide	To build trade awareness of who is who in the Leitrim food and drink ecosystem.	Develop and publish a directory of Leitrim producers as a practical guide for buyers and chefs when sourcing new food product.	Leitrim County Council / LEO	By June 2017	
1.2	Network Development	Form a Taste Leitrim industry network	Meet 3-4 times per year (including Taste of Leitrim event at The Organic Centre 13th August 2017). Set up private Facebook group to facilitate conversations and sharing information	Leitrim County Council / LEO	From May 2017	
1.3	Ambassador Programme	Ensure the voice of the industry is to the fore	Each year, appoint 3 ambassadors/spokespeople to champion Leitrim food and drink. Acting as key advocates and media contact points, they will be chosen on a cross country cross sector basis.	Selection committee led by LEO	By April annually	
1.4	Promoting entrepreneurial initiative	Mentor bank To build the strategic competence of Leitrim's food & drink producers and places to eat	Provide a 'bank' of 150 mentoring hours for food businesses per annum	LEO	Ongoing	
1.5	Promoting entrepreneurial initiative	Start your own food business	Train 10 emerging food entrepreneurs per annum	LEO	March annually	
1.6	Promoting entrepreneurial initiative	Provide free online training course on how to set up a street food business	Training to set up a food business on a shoestring.	The Food Hub	From May 2017	
1.7	Promoting entrepreneurial initiative	Regional Supervalu, Bord Bia, LEO Food Academy programme with Sligo and Donegal	Train 6 growth orientated Leitrim food entrepreneurs per annum	LEO, Bord Bia, Supervalu	September annually	
1.8	Investment Conduit	Financial supports - allocate at least 20% of overall Priming Grants and 20% of	Critical resources to grow food and drink businesses in the county	LEO	Ongoing	

		Expansion Grants to the food sector (subject to eligible applications)			
<b>1.9</b>	Investment Conduit	Investigate the opportunity to put together an investment fund to resource emerging and growing Leitrim food businesses	We will investigate the opportunity to put together an investment fund to resource emerging and growing Leitrim food businesses. We will convene stakeholders from the public and private sector to investigate setting up a dedicated investment fund. This will then be poised for supports for Accelerator developments which we anticipate will emerge in the lifetime of our Strategy.	The Food Hub	By June 2017
<b>1.10</b>	Strengthen export market reach	Investigate demand, engage with Bord Bia and Enterprise Ireland and seek the resources to run a Food Export Support Programme on a regional basis with Donegal and Sligo.	Assist 6 Leitrim food and drink businesses to work on a programme of activity which will assist them gain entry into new export markets in Northern Ireland, UK and beyond. It will focus on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of core skills to build export sales and turnover;</li> <li>• To investigate routes to market including cross border and overseas;</li> <li>• To exhibit and market local produce at a range of popular industry and retail focussed trade fairs and events in NI, UK and further afield.</li> </ul>	LEO	By May 2017
<b>1.11</b>	Strengthen export market reach	Brexit focus workshop for Leitrim's food and drink producers	We will host a Brexit focus workshop for Leitrim's food and drink producers and thereafter support companies through specialist mentoring.	The Food Hub, LEO, Enterprise Ireland	By May 2018
<b>1.12</b>	Global food kitchen	Nurture and bring to market the cultural diversity of food across the county	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Run training courses for different ethnic cuisines</li> <li>• Ensure that local ethnic food caterers are represented at local festivals and other food events.</li> <li>• Work with local ethnic restaurants to develop and promote recipes that combine local, seasonal ingredients with traditional cooking methods.</li> </ul>	The Food Hub	Ongoing



THEME TWO	SALES & ROUTES TO MARKET					
	ACTION	OBJECTIVE	DETAIL	WHO	WHEN	
2.1	Stimulating local and regional markets	Support the work of Leitrim's three farmer/country markets, Carrick, Mohill and Manorhamilton.	Instigate a joint mentoring programme to build trade and consumer awareness, increase marketing skills, identify innovative ways to increase footfall, new routes to market, a fresh focus on event planning and facilitate networking to increase co-operation between the markets	LEO Leitrim Development Company	2017 - 2018	
2.2	Taste Leitrim Distribution Network	Facilitate 8 Leitrim food producers to establish a co-operative business model for shared distribution	Identify funds to employ a distribution agent to work with local producers to overcome barriers to distribution in the Dublin market	Trade LEO The Food Hub	2017	
2.3	Taste Leitrim Food Supply Chain	Provide a dedicated food unit to service the storage needs of distribution co-operative	Allocate and modify a unit in The Food Hub to act as a distribution hub	The Food Hub Leitrim County Council (REDZ)	2017	
2.4	EU TRINNO Project	Develop an action plan to examine the possibility of establishing a regional food distribution hub in the USEFE region	Project is looking at the potential of <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use existing food depots as regional food distribution hubs</li><li>• Rural Social Scheme worker to do the packing in the food distribution hubs</li><li>• Developing a few distribution hubs across the west, south and east of Ireland all linked up</li></ul>	WestBIC, NWRA supported by Cavan, Leitrim, Longford and Roscommon local authorities	It is anticipated that the research element of this project will be complete by July 2017.	
2.5	Taste Leitrim hamper	For sale online and through retail channels within and outside the county.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Call for products, pricing and logistics plans</li><li>• Modify <a href="http://www.tasteleitrim.com">www.tasteleitrim.com</a> website provide online sales platforms for a Taste Leitrim hamper</li><li>• Establish a digital order mechanism</li><li>• Support retail, corporate and wholesale channels for the hamper</li><li>• Instigate high impact online marketing campaign</li></ul>	The Food Hub Leitrim County Council (REDZ)	By September 2017	
2.6	Online Trading Voucher		Maximise the number of food businesses and places to eat that can trade online	LEO	Ongoing	

THEME THREE	FOOD TOURISM				
	ACTION	OBJECTIVE	DETAIL	WHO	WHEN
3.1	Celebrate our Taste Leitrim provenance	Provide branded Taste Leitrim point of sale pack	To emphasise to the public the local provenance of the produce, marketing materials will be provided for places to eat to display with pride	Leitrim County Council / LEO	By June 2017
3.2	Be more visible	Provide branded Taste Leitrim point of sale pack	For use at external events, festivals etc, a Taste Leitrim merchandising and display pack will be made available to agencies and producer groups to highlight the Leitrim connection.	Leitrim County Council / LEO	By June 2017
3.3	Strengthen Leitrim's food events	Provide resources to assist 3 key food events in the county	Provide support and resources to key Leitrim food events - to the existing Taste of Carrick and 2 new food Taste Leitrim festivals in Drumshanbo and Rossinver	Leitrim County Council / LEO	Annually
3.4	Build upon and publicise the 5 Taste Leitrim local food trails for visitors to the county	Increase the businesses included on the virtual food trail to include farm visits and growers and provide an offline marketing resource for same	Update the current Taste Leitrim digital trails and produce a Taste Leitrim consumer brochure that will be widely distributed	Leitrim County Council / LEO	By June 2017
3.5	Draw benefit from the Wild Atlantic Way	Proactively link the North Leitrim Taste Leitrim trail with the WAW project	Work with the key stakeholders in North Leitrim to ensure advantage can be accrued.	Trade Leitrim Tourism	Ongoing
3.6	Draw benefit from the Blueways	Proactively link the Blueways initiative	Work with the key stakeholders in the Blueways initiative including Leitrim Tourism and Waterways Ireland to ensure advantage can be accrued.	Trade Leitrim Tourism	Ongoing
3.7	Development of new culinary tourism experience unit at The Food Hub	Provide the tourist the opportunity to physically experience the food of the Leitrim and the wider region in a new and engaging	Design and equip an interactive visitor experience and culinary kitchen backed by a pre-determined and timetabled programme which will be widely marketed to visitors.	Leitrim County Council / The Food Hub	By June 2017

		visitor attraction based at The Food Hub, Drumshanbo.				
<b>3.8</b>		Produce and widely circulate a calendar of food tourism events in the county	Encourage producers and places to eat to put forward 1 event per annum for inclusion in a well marketed event calendar	Collate information and publish (both online and in the printed food trail brochure) the calendar of events	Leitrim County Council / The Food Hub	By June 2017 and annually thereafter
<b>3.9</b>		Support Leitrim's boxty producers	Pursue PGI status for boxty as a regional speciality	In addition to the PGI application, give prominence to The Leitrim Boxty Story through digital marketing and work with the producers to play a key role in Action 3.7	LEO	Ongoing
<b>THEME FOUR</b>	<b>FOOD INNOVATION &amp; NEW PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT</b>					
		<b>ACTION</b>	<b>OBJECTIVE</b>	<b>DETAIL</b>	<b>WHO</b>	<b>WHEN</b>
<b>4.1</b>		Support for innovation and niche product development	Strengthen Leitrim's focus on healthy food innovation	Bring together the innovators in healthy food in the county to plan and seek resources for a support programme of R&D support, routes to market and marketing tools required to bring that product to a national launch	LEO, Teagasc	By Spring 2018 and annually thereafter
<b>4.2</b>		Develop link with Leitrim Recreation Forum	Investigate collaborative projects	Seek collaborative opportunities and resources to link Leitrim food into the recreation strategy and unpin the outdoor recreation product with a fitting food offering	Leitrim County Council, Recreation Forum	By October 2017
<b>4.3</b>		Graduate work placement programme for food and hospitality sector	Broker a work placement programme between Institute of Technologies and NUIIG St. Angelas, students and trade	Building on the work of the Graduate Internship for Entrepreneurship Programme (USEFE) to ensure food companies will engage a graduate in their business.	LEO, Institute of Technologies, NUIIG St. Angelas, Trade	By Spring 2018 and annually thereafter
<b>4.4</b>		Build technical capacity	Introduction to Food Hygiene	Industry training	LEO	March annually

<b>4.5</b>	Build technical capacity	HACCP Food Hygiene	Industry training	LEO	October annually
<b>4.6</b>	Build technical capacity	Assist companies apply for Innovation Vouchers	Increase the number of applications from Leitrim food and drink companies to the Enterprise Ireland Innovation Voucher scheme		
<b>4.7</b>	Strengthen export market reach	Investigate demand for a regional BRC Global Standard Food Safety programme	Assist 6 Leitrim food and drink businesses to achieve BRC Global Standard Food Safety standard	LEO	By May 2017
<b>4.8</b>	Waste minimisation and greening programme	Investigate potential to deliver a sectoral environmental programme	Design and source funding for a cross cutting programme to include topics such as • minimise waste, including portion control and effective food storage; • packaging reductions and recycling; • greater business responsibility for waste production; a strong emphasis on waste composting; and • turning waste into energy, bio-gas and anaerobic digestion.	Leitrim County Council	By December 2017
<b>THEME FIVE</b>	<b>EDUCATION, developing a food culture</b>				
	<b>ACTION</b>	<b>OBJECTIVE</b>	<b>DETAIL</b>	<b>WHO</b>	<b>WHEN</b>
<b>5.1</b>	Food Education Programme (youth)	Give children and young people opportunities to take part in practical food experiences (including cooking and growing food), and to learn about food and food choices.	Design and seek resources (e.g. corporate sponsor) for a programme to engage with primary and secondary schools and youth groups to facilitate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• visits to farms, food producers and hospitality businesses</li> <li>• practical cooking sessions with chefs and producers so that they become knowledgeable and creative about their food, about how it was produced and how it was prepared</li> </ul>	LEO	By September 2017
<b>5.2</b>	Enhance citizen and consumer empowerment through better knowledge	Support the critical role of voluntary and community groups to establish food projects and encourage participation from	Upskill and attract resources for voluntary and community organisations to instigate pilot projects such as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• community growing initiatives – both formal and informal</li> <li>• community supported agriculture and box schemes and</li> <li>• initiatives that make sustainable and affordable food products accessible to all communities</li> </ul>	LEO	By September 2017



		those who are under-represented.				
<b>5.3</b>	Convene a network of food educators in the county	Provide a county wide pathways programme that will bring a person from a Level 2 QQI course right through to access to college	Effect greater co-ordination and higher impact marketing of professional and vocational skill courses and seek additional resources to put in place access to more course places across all levels of QQI	Community based training organisations involved in food and horticulture, MSLETB, LEO	By September 2017	
<b>5.4</b>	Professional and Vocational Training	Measures to ensure supply of qualified hospitality and food service staff	Ensure training providers in the county are supported to expand the existing Professional and Vocational Training course provision. The professional development of our chefs and hospitality staff is also an important consideration. Some measures in this theme are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage a staff swap with another business for the benefit of the staff and their work experience</li> <li>• Conduct a needs analysis with employers and feed this information back into the educator's network</li> </ul>	Network of food educators	Ongoing	
<b>THEME SIX</b>	<b>SUPPORTING OUR FARMERS AND GROWERS</b>					
	<b>ACTION</b>	<b>OBJECTIVE</b>	<b>DETAIL</b>	<b>WHO</b>	<b>WHEN</b>	
<b>6.1</b>	Smallholders support programme	Strengthen the smallholder community in the county	Take measures so that local growers are supported to increase their overall market share of sustainable produce sold in the county	Leitrim Organic Farmer's Coop Leitrim Development Company	By September 2017	
<b>6.2</b>	Abattoirs	Strengthen the sustainability of Leitrim's 6 abattoirs and 2 Leitrim meat wholesalers	Seek funds to build on Leitrim Development Company's work in training Leitrim's abattoirs	Leitrim LEO Leitrim Development Company	Commence in 2018	
<b>6.3</b>	Horticulture	Add value to horticulture production	Support Leitrim's growers to add value to their produce by signposting and encouraging them to avail of supports outlined in Theme Four Food Innovation and New Product Development.	Leitrim LEO Leitrim Development Company	Commence in 2018	

<b>6.4</b>	Bees	Support Leitrim's beekeepers	Support Digges Beekeeping Club required include enhancing the website to incorporate video and advise and access to finance for developing the retail range.	Leitrim LEO Development Company	By September 2017
<b>6.5</b>	Encourage the local fruit farming industry	Support a review the potential for local fruit production for both direct supply but also for the drink companies in the county.	Identify markets (e.g. for the county's drinks producers) and the supply for market locally. Encourage education projects	Leitrim Organic Farmer's Coop Leitrim LEO Development Company	Commence in 2018
<b>6.6</b>	Social farming	Enhance the work in developing social farming in Co. Leitrim	Support the work of Leitrim Development Company's Social Farming Office	Leitrim Development Company	Ongoing
<b>THEME SEVEN</b>	<b>INFRASTRUCTURE</b>				
	<b>ACTION</b>	<b>OBJECTIVE</b>	<b>DETAIL</b>	<b>WHO</b>	<b>WHEN</b>
<b>7.1</b>	Increase supply of food production space in the county	Develop the county as a Food Enterprise Zone with a strong pipeline of food production facilities	Completion of a technical and financial feasibility study to ascertain: - Building requirements vis a vis demand Innovative business models (e.g. public private partnership) that will provide the resources for the realisation of the project. This will include how to lever funds through Crowd Funding, tenants as investors e.g. prepayment of rent and other public private formulas.	Leitrim County Council (REDZ), The Food Hub	By June 2017
<b>7.2</b>	Increase trade knowledge of the supports available to establish and grow their businesses	Provide an investment signposting and grant advisory service	A bi-monthly external mentoring service will be made available to those with development plans.	LEO	Bi-monthly

THEME EIGHT	ORGANICS & SLOW FOOD				
	ACTION	OBJECTIVE	DETAIL	WHO	WHEN
8.1	Supporting fair trade and other ethical trading schemes	Nurturing a fairer food society	Encourage businesses and institutions to stock fair trade products including public sector	The Food Hub and all stakeholders	Ongoing
8.2	Increase visibility of organic farming	Integrated our organic producers in Taste Leitrim marketing platforms	Include organic farmers on the food trails & encourage farmer- education, field walks, farm visits.	Leitrim LEO	2017
8.3	Increase visibility of organic farming	Launch a new Leitrim Organic Week	This new event will build on the organic reputation of Leitrim and provide a celebration opportunity to focus the wider health and wellbeing credentials of the county. It will see a weeklong festival of events and the inclusion of special organic dishes on menus throughout the county.	Leitrim County Council LEO and all organic stakeholders	Sep-17
8.4	Emphasis on Slow Food	Draw benefit from and contribute to Leitrim Tourism's involvement in the Slow Tourism project SAINT	Support SAINT's work to promote local foods, traditional gastronomy and food production and encourage the farming of plants, seeds and livestock characteristic of the local ecosystem	Leitrim Tourism and all organic stakeholders	Ongoing
8.5	Support the work of North West Slow Food	Nurturing our slow food ethos	Provide an additional marketing platform for work of North West Slow Food	North West Slow Food	Ongoing
8.6	International linkage	Learn from international best practice	Avail of European linkages and funding opportunities that support our organic, slow food and wider food sector	Leitrim County Council, Leitrim LEO and all organic stakeholders	2017



Comhairle Chontae Liatroma  
Leitrim County Council

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