

Farmers to hear how to feed London's 7 million consumers

Press release - March 31, 2004

Farmland in and around the M25 could become London's breadbasket if farmers could only learn to cater for the capital's 7.4million consumers.

Next week sees the London Food Link Farmers' Conference at city hall* on Tuesday April 6, 2004 (from 11.00hrs), supported by the London Development Agency and the NFU.

Its keynote speaker, Sir Donald Curry, who chaired a recent Government Policy Commission on Sustainable Food and Farming, will highlight the enormous potential market in London for "local" food products.

London Food Link is a network of around 70 food interest groups, health authorities and business associations. The line-up for its conference includes three London farmers, major London food purchasers and food processors.

"Currently 80 per cent of London's food is imported – and yet there is now a major opportunity for farmers in and around the capital to tap into this enormous potential market. But it is fundamental that the public sector, including local authorities and health trusts, plays its part in procuring local food," said NFU SE Regional Director Shaun Leavey.

Honor Chapman CBE, chair of the London Development Agency, is chairing the morning session at the conference and the deputy mayor of London, Jenny Jones, will preside during the afternoon.

New policies for the food industry mean that the climate is right for farmers to shape their futures, exploiting potential markets for food in cities such as London. The impetus comes from new strategic documents on food and farming. A policy for London's food is being developed and the Government Office of the South East's Delivery Plan* for Farming and Food has been published.

The London Food Link conference will be a good opportunity for food producers to inform the work of the new mayoral food policy body, London Food. It will also give producers a chance to understand the purchasing arrangements of the public sector, especially hospitals. The NHS in Britain provides 300 million meals per year – often purchasing processed and pre-cooked food from large-scale caterers to a budget. London Food Link is running a Hospital Food Project to increase consumption of local food in four NHS hospitals in London.

London Food Link coordinator, Dan Keech, outlined the particular pressures faced by farmers in and around London. *"Many London farmers operate in a paradox. There are only a few hundred farmers in Greater London but they look after almost a tenth of the capital's land area."*

He explained: *"There is a pressure to diversify out of food production but planning restrictions may make infrastructure changes difficult. Although London farmers are close to Europe's biggest consumer market, they are often undercut by global food supply chains. The conference aims to explore these difficulties and develop solutions."*

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The London Development Agency(LDA) is also establishing a new food unit. Its first task will be to prepare a sustainable food and farming strategy for the capital. Honor Chapman CBE, chair of the LDA ,said: "*Farming must be part and parcel of the food economy in London, and also in the adjacent rural areas which we rely upon to help feed the city.*"

The conference at City Hall, London SE1 2AA is free thanks to funding from Bridge House Trust, the London Development Agency and NFU.

Notes to Editors

1. London Food Link is a project by Sustain, the alliance for better food and farming. London Food Link aims to help producers, consumers and retailers make a positive choice for sustainable local food. This means better access to affordable, high quality and seasonal food, shorter supply chains and campaigning for policies which promote a thriving food economy and culture. London Food Link members include councils, health authorities, businesses, environment and community groups.

For details contact: Dan Keech, London Food Link Co-ordinator, 020 7837 1228. www.londonfoodlink.org

2. The NFU is the leading trade association for farmers and growers www.nfuonline.com. **NFU SE PR Officer Isobel Bretherton is on: 01730 408002/07778 002617**

3. The London Development Agency is the Mayor's agency for business and jobs. The LDA prepares the Mayor's business plan for London and mobilises the support and resources of hundreds of partner organisations to help build a thriving economy for London's people, businesses and communities. The LDA is dedicated to improving sustainability, health and equality of opportunity for Londoners. **Contact Vincent Burke on 020 7954 4682. www.lda.gov.uk**

4. The new mayoral food policy body London Food was announced by Ken Livingstone in November 2003. Board members are due to be announced in April and it will be chaired by Jenny Jones, the Deputy Mayor of London. London Food will develop food policy for the capital, commission food sector research and monitor the implementation of the Food and Farming strategy for London, which will be prepared from April 2004. Details from Dan Keech at London Food Link, as 1. above. **The Government Office of the South East's delivery plan* for sustainable Farming and Food** in London and the South East was published in December 2003

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