

Case Study 6: Radstock Co-operative Society – success at last!

The project

The Eat Somerset Project ran for two and a half years between June 2006 and March 2009. Co-ordinated by Sustain (originally in partnership with Somerset Food Links), the project was funded by charitable grants from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and Friends of the Earth and (July 2008 to March 2009) by the Rural Renaissance Initiative. The aim was to develop trading links and new markets for local food producers, supporting 15 supplier businesses, and increasing the range of local produce available in six shops. Sustain is a not-for-profit organisation working to promote greater use of local and sustainable food. This series of Case Studies provides information on how the project has developed, successes achieved and challenges faced, for the purpose of sharing learning.

Background

One of the main aims of Eat Somerset was to increase the amount of local food available in convenience stores. To this end, the project contacted several retail chains – The Musgrave Group (which includes Budgen and Londis, and which has a strong interest in regional sourcing), Smiles Stores (a regional chain in the southwest), Spar and others.

Early on, the project also contacted the Radstock Co-operative Society (Radco), a regional arm of the national Co-op, with responsibility for one main store in Radstock and a further seven convenience stores (see: www.radstock-co-op.com). At the time, Alan Bonner, Chief Executive, had been recently appointed and other priorities meant Radco were not initially able to participate in the project. They did, however, receive information on the project and working party at regular intervals.

After some months, Eat Somerset project co-ordinator Alison Belshaw contacted Radco again with greater success. In August, 2008 Alison met with Alan Bonner and other members of Radco staff to discuss their requirements.

The process

The table below details the process that we went through.

Month	Action	Outcome
August 2008	Eat Somerset meets with Radco Chief Executive and Marketing contact.	Eat Somerset compiles a list of potential suppliers based on the discussions. Radco clear that the items needed to be long-life products in the first instance to test the level of interest and sales. This amounted to 19 producers.
3 rd December 2008	Project officer meets with Radco Chief Executive and Head of Operations.	List of 15 potential suppliers agreed along with meeting dates with these suppliers. Eat Somerset arranged schedule.

January 2009	Eat Somerset works with Radco to develop a list of questions for the producers.	Project officer distributes this list along with details of meeting, advice and information to all the producers prior to their meetings.
19 th & 27 th January	Two days of meetings to meet 15 producers. Chief Executive and Head of Operations interview potential suppliers. Eat Somerset project officer sits in on three of these interviews.	Radco agree their list of potential suppliers.
25 th February	Eat Somerset meets with Radco Chief Executive and Head of Operations.	Final list of 10 suppliers agreed. Further meeting dates set. Eat Somerset contacts all suppliers to advise whether selected or not. Eat Somerset organises schedule of further meetings.
14 th & 23 rd April	Radco meet with eight suppliers (two already on Co-op's books so easy to purchase from them without further meetings). These supplier meetings focused on discussing and agreeing pricing, order quantities and delivery.	Details agreed. Samples sent to Radco, orders placed by Radco with producers.
1 st June 2009	Radco launch their Eat Somerset range on a 6-month trial basis.	Range launched in 8 stores. Sales monitored weekly.



Caption: Eat Somerset range at Radstock Co-operative Society store, Radstock, Somerset



The producers

The local food producers involved in this are:

Producer	Produce	Location and approximate distance from Radstock store
Bath Ales www.bathales.com	Locally brewed beers	Warmley, South Gloucestershire (20 miles)
The Bay Tree www.thebaytree.co.uk	Range of preserves, chutneys etc	Evercreech, Shepton Mallet, Somerset (27 miles)
Fussel's Fine Foods www.fusselsfinefoods.co.uk	Rapeseed / sunflower oils, ranges of dressings	Rode, Somerset (9 miles)
Marshfield Bakery www.marshfieldbakery.co.uk	Cakes and biscuits	Marshfield, South Gloucestershire (19 miles)
The Orchard Pig www.orchardpig.co.uk	Apple Juices and Ciders	West Bradley, Glastonbury (17 miles)
Radford's Fine Fudge	Range of fudges	Martock, Somerset (30 miles)
Wickwar Brewery www.wickwarbrewing.co.uk	Locally brewed beers	Wickwar, South Gloucestershire (28 miles)

Unfortunately, after some negotiation, Radco made a decision not to order from one of the local food producers they originally help discussions with.



Caption: Eat Somerset range at Radstock

In conclusion

The key to the success of getting produce into the stores has been finding and working with the right people to be able to make it happen. Although contact with Radco has been maintained over the two years to get to this stage, this in an indication of the amount of time that might be needed to develop a scheme with a larger business.

We observe that it is essential to work at the pace of the buyer whilst remaining determined to achieve clear outcomes. Persistence has certainly paid off in this instance and we hope that the trial is successful for both Radco and the producers.

Sometimes it is difficult to match retailer demands with the needs of the producer and vice versa. For a trial it is important that both parties are supportive and understand the requirements of each side. Should this trial be a success then other products can be added to the range. Potentially fresh produce could be introduced.

The project has benefited from the opportunity to sit in on interviews with suppliers and be able to see both sides of the situation. This is a unique opportunity which has enabled solutions to be found to any problems that may arise, and solutions shared across a wider range of participants. As an independent and not-for-profit party, Eat Somerset is not representing any particular side, but the independence has enabled the interviews to be set up and new trading relationships to be formed between buyers and sellers.

Feedback from participants

"We hope that customers respond positively to the fact that we are bringing them high quality, locally sourced products which contributes to the sustainability of local producers and cuts down on 'food miles' by reducing the distance travelled to get product on to the shelves. We are looking to extend the number of suppliers that we add to the 'Eat Somerset' range in the future."

Alan Bonner, Chief Executive, Radco

"One of my objectives when I set up Fussel's Fine Foods was to connect local people with high quality locally produced food, and so I naturally wanted to work with Eat Somerset. They have been a great help and support in many ways and in particular the fact that I can see my brand on the shelves of RADCO, the most important local retailer in our area, is a testament to the great job that they do." **Andy Fussel, Fussel's Fine Foods**

"The Radfords Fudge team has been exceptionally pleased with how the supply relationship with Radstock Co-Operative has developed. The process of presenting samples at the Dragon's Den stage, to getting acceptance, to receipt of first orders has been a very smooth process: the Radco team have been helpful at every stage and the journey to launch has been a professional and well orchestrated process with Sustain providing guidance and support along the way. Now that we have launched our range of fudge products we are delighted with the volume of business that has been generated. We have had to warn the cows, that produce our clotted cream, to work extra hard to make enough yummy cream to meet the high orders. After one week from the launch, the high level of sales is proving that our award-winning Clotted Cream Fudge is a winner with the Radstock Co-operative's customers!" **Colin Tyler, Radford's Fine Fudge**

Eat Somerset set up and saw us through. I had been trying to get a meeting with Radco for months. Everything is always well thought through, professionally done and we have gained customers. I will follow up anything Eat Somerset is involved in!!" **Andrew Quinlan, The Orchard Pig**

Feedback from Radco – July 2008

Sales are being monitored on a weekly basis. So far, beers and ciders are selling well, as is the rapeseed oil. It is likely that different produce will sell well in different stores due to where they are located. Some adjustment may be needed to where some of the produce is located in the store e.g. pasta sauces may sell better alongside other similar products. Radco will continue to monitor sales over the six month period after which the trial will be fully reviewed.

The Eat Somerset website is at:
<http://www.sustainweb.org/eatsomerset>

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