

Food and Beverage Strategy for **County Wicklow** 2019 - 2021



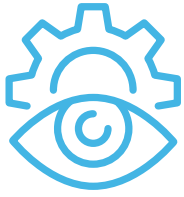


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1. Introduction



In May 2018, Wicklow County Council tendered the creation of a food strategy for the county. Following the tender process, James Burke & Associates (JB&A) were appointed to facilitate the research and creation of a food strategy for the region. The scope of the strategy included the following:



- An up to date listing of food producers in Co. Wicklow (and proposals as to how to maintain this listing)
- Actions for the development of the food economy in Wicklow covering the following sectors or themes:
 - Food Industry
 - Food Brand
 - Food Sector Network
 - Food Tourism
 - Linkages between Agriculture and the food sector
 - Food Poverty and Food Sustainability
 - Education and Training
 - Community food initiatives
- Identification of actors and activities in the county involved in addressing food poverty and creation of a listing of these
- Each theme should identify a series of actions and each action should be allocated to a relevant local agency for implementation
- A body or item of research to defend proposing each action
- Costings of each action
- Future cost of maintaining and implementing the strategy



2. Foreword



Frank Curran

Wicklow as a county is known for its natural and wholesome environment, and food and beverage production has always been an integral part of this. While this is a well-known fact, preparing this strategy has uncovered an amazing number of innovative and exciting food and beverage products and has brought together a large number of very committed and very passionate people involved in all aspects of this sector.

What has been most striking is the unique nature of food and beverage production in County Wicklow. The artisan food and beverage producers show true vision in going beyond the traditional and in introducing aspects such as foraging and food heritage.

Along with food production and promotion, this strategy addresses some of the important food related challenges that every society is facing such as food resilience, food waste, food security and food poverty. In doing so the strategy will contribute to the health and well-being of the residents of county Wicklow as well as contributing to the local economy. This is probably the most challenging issue to be addressed and it is in this area especially that innovation is crucial.

Implementing this strategy will demonstrate what can happen when we all work together. Different stakeholders will have different roles to play: supporting and networking; training and development; innovating; marketing and promotion; sharing with visitors; developing our resilience. Thanks go to everybody involved in developing this initiative. The Wicklow Food and Beverage Strategy Committee includes many of the leading food and beverage entrepreneurs in the county as well as leading agencies; Wicklow County Council, County Wicklow Partnership and the PPN. Working in partnership, they are best placed to lead and drive the strategy and ensure that it is innovative and dynamic. Their drive and commitment will ensure that this will be achieved.

Frank Curran

Chief Executive, Wicklow County Council

Cllr Pat Vance

Cathaoirleach, Wicklow County Council



Cllr Pat Vance



3. Executive Summary

In May 2018, Wicklow County Council tendered to appoint a contractor to facilitate the research and development of a food and beverage strategy for the county.

Following extensive consultations with local food and beverage stakeholders, the following key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats were identified:

- **Strengths**
 - Proximity & access to Dublin food market
 - Emerging Wicklow food calendar
 - Culinary garden of Ireland image
 - Food related heritage stories for the County
- **Weaknesses**
 - Lack of marketing/promotion of Wicklow food & beverage
 - Under development of Wicklow food assets
 - Weak food infrastructure
 - Absence of County wide stakeholder collaboration
- **Opportunities**
 - Tie in with Ireland's Ancient East e.g. Vikings, monks, and food history
 - To further increase food clusters e.g. Drink cluster in Newtownmountkennedy
 - To increase the number of food events throughout the year
 - The development of new emerging oyster and mussel sectors
 - Improved food community stakeholder collaboration
- **Threats**
 - Failure to get local food onto local menus in the majority of outlets = no visibility
 - Dublin sprawl = potential for Wicklow to lose its food identity
 - Complacency re food poverty
 - Challenges to find suitable skilled staff across all parts of the food sector
 - Failure to implement the food strategy
 - The potential impact of Brexit



In particular, the research identified an emerging food dynamic within Wicklow, and a clear appetite among food and beverage stakeholders to build on work streams already started.

In parallel there was also clear evidence that, while there were lots of good individual activities, these were not coordinated to work in conjunction with each other. There was also few examples of stakeholders working together, or with a single vision for the food and beverage sector. This is where the opportunity lies.

The consultation process led to the development of five key goals:

1. To tell the Wicklow Food Story
2. To develop a Food Activity Calendar (Business to Consumer)
3. To increase Food Stakeholder Networking (Business to Business)
4. To get Local Food to Local Consumers
5. To provide appropriate business supports

Each of these goals is backed up with action points. The action points have allocated deadlines and budgets for each.



4. Methodology

4.1. Methods Used

To facilitate the strategy formation, the following methods were used:

- Focus groups
- Face-to-face meetings
- Telephone interviews
- Desk research on domestic and international food initiatives
- Food related literature review
- Interaction with food agencies
- Formulating conclusions and report writing
- Ongoing liaison with Wicklow Food Strategy Steering Group



4.2. Phases

The project was broken down into distinct phases. Each phase informed the next phase.

- **Phase 1** – Formation of strategy steering group
- **Phase 2** – Understand and assess the current Wicklow food landscape
- **Phase 3** – Undertake stakeholder group meetings to secure feedback
- **Phase 4** – Conduct One to One Interviews
- **Phase 5** – Undertake desk research on domestic and international best practice in the food sector
- **Phase 6**- Strategy write up



5. Why Have a Food Strategy for County Wicklow?

In more recent times, Wicklow county has seen an increased amount of activity on its food landscape. Producer numbers have grown, new emerging food and beverage categories have become commonplace, and there are signs of a strengthening food calendar of activity.

The challenge to date has been that many great food activities in the region are operated in isolation, and do not benefit from a coordinated food approach across the county. See a list of Wicklow food stakeholder groups who will benefit from the strategy in **Figure 1**.

The objective of the strategy is to create a coordinated approach to the food sector which will allow the food industry to move further and faster towards the long-term goal of becoming a regional leader on the Irish food landscape.

Not only will The Food and Beverage Strategy for County Wicklow integrate existing and emerging food activities under one coordinated strategic framework, it will also align Wicklow's food goals with broader county policies, including transportation, urban health, housing for workforce etc.

Food is a tool which can help re-invent Wicklow as it is perceived by those that live there, and the domestic and international visitor.

The Food and Beverage Strategy for County Wicklow will create a more focused approach by providing a three-year roadmap for the local food economy and help the stakeholder groups achieve success. **Figure 2** sets out the key areas of the strategy focus.

In more recent years' lots of work has been conducted to strengthen the food and beverage sector within the county. New training and upskilling programmes like Food Starter, Food Academy and a range of food tourism training initiatives have been undertaken. An alcohol beverage cohort of producers has started to emerge and several 'global first' food initiatives have been undertaken, for example, the Zero Km Dinner.

Food is a tool which can help re-invent Wicklow as it is perceived by those that live there, and the domestic and international visitor.





With this increased activity the region needs a food strategy to support an ever increasing array of initiatives. The strategy will assist with the following:

- Bring greater vision and direction to the food arena within the region
- Identify priorities
- Ensure that all food stakeholders and food agencies have a common roadmap
- Provide a forum for agencies connected with food and drink to work together
- Foster greater inter-county collaboration where appropriate
- Allow for funding to be targeted in a cohesive manner
- Make greater use of existing resources
- Simplify decision making
- Improve communications to all cohorts
- Ensure commitment from all stakeholders

Figure 1: Wicklow Food Stakeholders Groups



Figure 2: Wicklow Food Strategy Areas of Focus



6. Overview of Wicklow's Food Landscape

6.1 Food History

Historically, Wicklow has been synonymous with food and has earned itself the name of 'The Garden of Ireland' with a green and clean image.

The region has many monastic sites all steeped in tales of food culture in the form of bee keeping and beer brewing as well as general food production.

In the early 20th century the County dominated some food categories, for example, two-thousand people were employed harvesting oysters from natural reefs, which were supplied across Europe. The beds were reported to have stretched for 50km and Arklow alone was selling nearly 3,000 tonnes a year.



6.2. Food and Agriculture Today

The following information is an overview of Wicklow's current agriculture landscape, with statistics taken from the IFA (2016 report) and the CSO (2010).

From the IFA 2016 report, the following statistics are extracts:

- The total number of Wicklow farms is 2,431
- Sheep farming is most popular with a total of 170,572 ewes in Wicklow
- Wicklow's agriculture sector supports 1,081 jobs in food and drink processing
- The total number of those employed at farm level is 3,127



In 2011, the Wicklow workforce total was 31,131 people. Of that total, the number working in agriculture, forestry, and fishing was 1,714 people (5.5%). This number places agriculture as the 5th most prevalent job in Wicklow.



The 2010 Agriculture census offers a comprehensive view of farming by county. In Wicklow in 2010, the statistics were as follows:

- 2,394 farms (1.7% of Ireland's total farm population)
- Of these 2,394 farms, 536 were sized between 30 and 50 acres
- Sheep farming was the most popular endeavor, totaling 317,978
- Cattle farming was the second most popular category with a total of 118,957



6.3 Wicklow Food Production

Desk research was carried out to identify how Wicklow compares to other parts of the country with regard to food production. Reliable food and beverage producer numbers are not available from any source, and therefore Food Academy numbers were used as the benchmark.

Below are the results:

COUNTY	POPULATION
Wicklow	142,332
Wexford	130,425
Mayo	149,605
Donegal	147,554
Kerry	158,755

Figure 3: Counties with a Similar Population to Wicklow

COUNTY	FOOD ACADEMY PRODUCERS
Wicklow	20
Wexford	14
Mayo	14
Donegal	7
Kerry	13

Figure 4: Food Academy Producer numbers



Based on this analysis, when a ratio of producers to population is applied, the results show Wicklow having a higher number of producers per head of population compared to many other counties.

COUNTY	POPULATION
Wicklow	1:7,116
Wexford	1:9,316
Mayo	1:10,686
Donegal	1:21,079
Kerry	1:12,211

Figure 5: County Population

6.4 Wicklow County Tourism:



More recently, the Wicklow County Development Plan 2016 - 2022 recognises the role that food can play in the future. It states the Wicklow tourism board wants to attract and retain visitors from Dublin, around the country and beyond, and plans to offer a promotional platform to support existing and generate future tourism trade activities in the Wicklow area. Glendalough has been categorised as an important area. The Wicklow food and beverage assets (shown in section 7.2 are well positioned to underpin the overall county tourism focus.



Ireland's Ancient East (See section 6.6.3 below), part of the national tourism promotional strategy incorporates story-telling, and experiential activities. The Wicklow food landscape and food stakeholders have the potential to become a major 'stand out' on this tourism route as much of the food landscape and food heritage lends itself to experiential activities and storytelling.



6.5 Wicklow Food and Beverage Initiatives:

Wicklow food stakeholders have undertaken many projects in recent years. Below are some examples:

6.5.1 Zero Km

The BrookLodge Hotel & Macreddin Village presented a unique dining experience in 2017, which was a world first. In the 'Zero Km' event, the BrookLodge served a meal that was entirely sourced - reared, grown, and harvested - within one kilometre of the kitchen. This event was driven as a result of the public's growing concern with the origins of their food, which meant that tickets for the meal were totally oversubscribed and sold out within hours of going on sale.

6.5.2 Wild & Slow Festival

Wild and Slow is a unique festival that celebrates everything that is good about Irish food; fresh, local, traditional and wild. It is a year-long event in its planning that culminates in November in the BrookLodge Hotel & Macreddin Village and is supported by many bodies including Bord Bia and Fáilte Ireland. The festival encourages the public to preserve the natural grown wild herbs and berries of Ireland.

6.5.3 Taste of Wicklow

Now in its sixth year and led by Wicklow Chamber of Commerce, the Taste of Wicklow Food Festival sets out to promote all that is good about food production and crafts in Co Wicklow. The event has over thirty artisan food stalls, ten craft stalls and many workshops. Guest celebrity chefs enhanced the event with cookery demos, tastings, etc.

6.5.4 Other Food and Beverage Initiatives

The above are merely examples of high profile events and the County has dozens of other food activities which are either dedicated solely to food and beverage, or where local food supports a non-food event. This includes the emergence of some new food and beverage trails.





Examples of activities under these headings include:

- Wings Food Festival Bray
- Meet the Makers one-day food and drink tour of Wicklow
- The Nectar Way food tourism initiative

The Tinahealy Agricultural Show is also a key milestone in the annual food calendar. There are also food associations with leisure aspects such as the 'Cliff walk' with those frequenting it often combining a meal at the end point.

6.5.5 Wicklow Farmers Markets

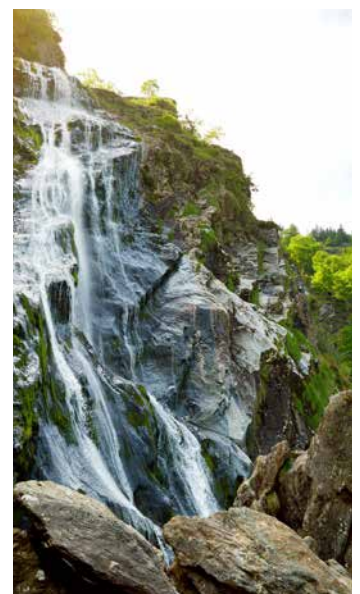
Wicklow has a reasonable number of farmers/food markets which are set out below. Producers/growers did comment during the research, that the volume of sales at some of these markets has limitations:

- Kilruddery House & Gardens: Every Saturday 10am-3pm
- Blessington Country Market: First Sunday of every month, 10am-4pm
- Cottage Market Glenealy: Every Saturday 10am-3pm
- Castleruddery Organic Farm: Fridays
- Aughrim Town & Country Market Every Saturday 10am-2pm
- Macreddin Village Food Market: First Sunday of the month, 12pm-5pm
- Bray Farmer's and Food Market: Every Saturday, 9am-6pm
- Dunlavin Farmers Market: Every Saturday, 10am-2pm
- North Wicklow Country Market: Every Saturday, 10.30am-12.30pm
- Roundwood Home Producers Market: Every Sunday, 12pm-5pm

Wicklow has also an established reputation in the growing of organic vegetables with projects like An Taiseach's farm and ecology centre. Growth in vegan and vegetarian consumer offers are also strong in the region with several foodservice operators promoting this food choice including The Happy Pear.



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6.5.6 Local Enterprise Office – Support of Food Businesses in Wicklow

The aim of Local Enterprise Office (LEO) Wicklow is to promote entrepreneurship, foster business start-ups and develop existing micro and small businesses to drive job creation and to provide high quality supports for business ideas in County Wicklow. LEO Wicklow proactively supports Food and Beverage Businesses in County Wicklow, by providing a range of training, mentoring, and financial supports designed to assist Food companies during the start-up, growth and development phase.

In addition to a myriad of general business training programmes combined with Food and Beverage sector, specific programmes such as the Food Academy and food mentoring are provided to help businesses facing specific challenges e.g. Brexit. LEO Wicklow has approved over €780K in financial supports for Wicklow based food and beverage businesses since the Local Enterprise office was set up in April 2014.

The range of Financial Supports available include priming and business expansion grants towards employment, capital equipment and marketing and consultancy expenses. The Local Enterprise office can also assist Food and Beverage Businesses to start selling online with trading online vouchers and those businesses seeking to export can also avail of the Technical Assistance for Micro Exporters grants.

Eligibility criteria apply for the above grants and further information and examples of projects/businesses which will not qualify for grant assistance are outlined on the Local Enterprise Office Wicklow Website www.localenterprise.ie/Wicklow/.

6.5.7 County Wicklow Partnership

County Wicklow Partnership (CWP) was formed in January 2009 and administers a suite of community, enterprise, employment and family support programmes funded largely through the Department of Rural and Community Development (inc Pobal) and the HSE. County Wicklow Partnership's activities cover all of Co. Wicklow. CWP is the implementing partner of Wicklow Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) which is the LAG (Local Action Group) for County Wicklow. That means that CWP is responsible for animating the LEADER programme in Co. Wicklow but funding decisions are made by Wicklow LCDC.

The LEADER Initiative (Liaisons entre actions de developpement de l'économie rurale) was established by the European Commission in 1991 and was designed to aid the development of sustainable rural communities following the reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy. Highly successful, it operates across the European Union and in all rural areas of Ireland. LEADER is part funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the Irish Exchequer. There is a LEADER project budget of approx. €4.7 million available for Co. Wicklow up to December 2020.

The development of the food and beverage sector is highlighted for LEADER support under the enterprise measure of the Local Development Strategy for Co. Wicklow. CWP works closely with the Local Enterprise Office (LEO) in this regard. The LEADER / Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014 – 2020 offers a range of supports to local communities and businesses including grant assistance for capital, technical assistance, marketing and training projects. There is also a national LEADER Food Initiative in place to support local businesses.





6.6 Overview of Ireland's National Food Landscape

6.6.1 Foodwise 2025

The Foodwise 2025 is a government strategy that sets out a 10-year plan in the agri-food industry, this strategy sets out to continue the growth of the Irish food industry which is vital for communities across the country. Foodwise 2025 sets out a clear and strategic plan for the Irish agri-food sector to enable it to act more strategically and achieve recognition in the international marketplace. The sub-title of this project is 'Local Roots, Global Reach'. Foodwise focuses on five key areas to develop growth:

- Human Capital
- Competitiveness
- Market Development
- Innovation
- Sustainability

Food Wise 2025 identifies significant growth opportunities across all subsectors of the Irish agri-food industry. Cumulatively, it projects export have the potential to grow to €19bn per annum in value by 2025, a figure that would represent an 85% increase from the current three-year average. This export growth will be driven chiefly by expansion in dairy, beef, seafood and consumer food and drinks exports.



Foodwise 2025 highlights the following areas as opportunities within the Food and Beverage sectors:

- Growth in global demand for nutritious food.
- Growth in demand for new products associated with latest consumer trends.
- Green/Sustainable Reputation
- Expansion in Dairy, Meat, PCF and Seafood Sectors
- Potential for new Foreign Direct Investments

Specific to the artisan/small food business sector Foodwise 2025 recommends the following actions:

- Creation of civic and festival markets similar to the English Market in Cork and Harvest Festival in Waterford in our major cities and towns.
- Expansion of Dublin Food Chain initiative to other cities. Create a pipeline of companies growing beyond Artisan/Small Food Business definition via the introduction of both bespoke 1:1 and group multi-level supports across strategic planning, marketing and marketing finance (for example Ascent, Super brands and Step Change Fund).
- Introduce a new support programme for Direct to Consumer producers aimed at enabling producers to extend their local and regional business reach and resulting in a pipeline for new entrants to the Artisan Food Market at Bloom.
- Increase the opportunity for successful meet the buyer occasions through market focused relationship development with distributors, specialist retailers, and other retail and foodservice buyers on the domestic and international markets.
- Annual investment in and delivery of small business specific consumer and market insights. Formal opportunities to transfer learnings from craft food and drink production to new sector entrants via food apprenticeships and placements.

The formation of The Wicklow Food and Beverage strategy will embrace the Foodwise 2025 recommendations.

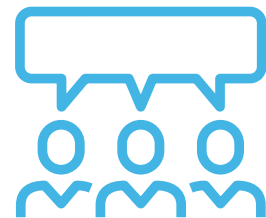
The recommendations of Foodwise 2025 have been taken on board when formulating the Wicklow Food and Beverage Strategy.

6.6.2 Fáilte Ireland Food Strategy

Fáilte Ireland have launched a new Food and Drink Strategy for 2018-2023. This strategy states that a vibrant tourism industry is vital for Irelands economy and prosperity, to achieve this the Irish food and drink tourism industry must be developed and the food and drink experience that Ireland offers must be enhanced. Food and drink are both a vital part of a consumer's local experience when visiting Ireland. Currently food and drink accounts for one third of a tourist's total expenditure, and in Ireland food and beverage makes up 35% of a visitor's overall spend which equates to over €2 billion.

This strategy aims to grow foreign earnings from international business and leisure visitors to Ireland, grow the numbers of those who are employed in tourism, and to ensure that the importance of tourism to Irelands economic growth and regional development is understood.

This strategy will build on the success of Fáilte Irelands past food strategy, 'Fáilte Irelands Food Tourism Activity Plan 2014-2016', which led to many successful initiatives such as the Boyne Valley region.

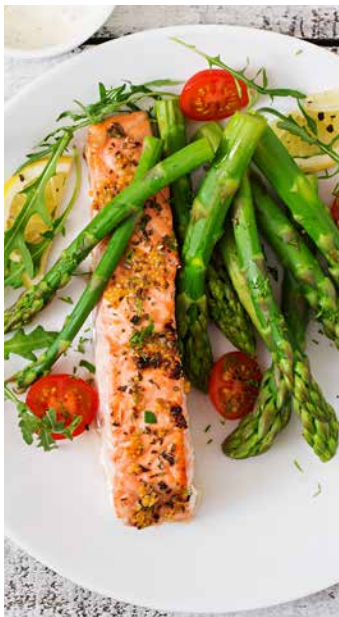
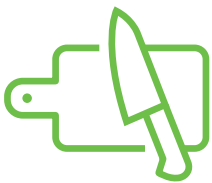
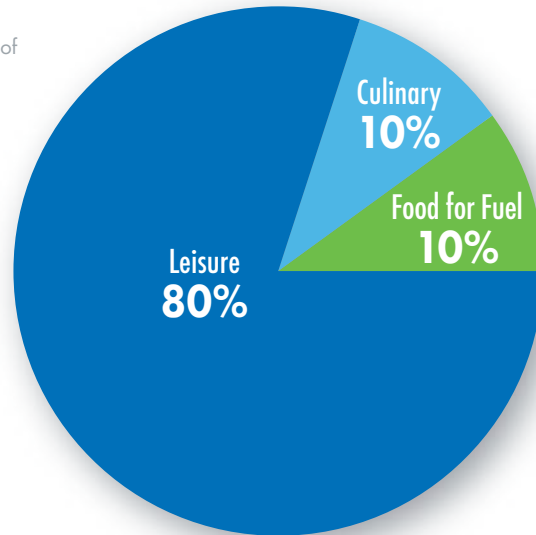


Increase the opportunity for successful meet the buyer occasions through market focused relationship development with distributors, specialist retailers, and other retail and foodservice buyers on the domestic and international markets.



This initiative will be guided and modelled by actions taken by other countries/regions such as Catalonia, Peru, Australia, and the Netherlands. The food experience is becoming increasingly more important and this is often driven by intense social media activity surrounding unique food and drink experiences. The target market for this strategy is broken up into three different groups:

Figure 6: Breakdown of Ireland's Tourists



1. **'Culinary Tourists'**: This group of tourists seek unique and memorable eating and drinking experiences. These make up 10% of the market. Food is the primary reason for this group's tourism. They want to try new food in a local and traditional context.
2. **'Food as Fuel' Tourists**: Those who want to consume food on the go, as quickly and as cheaply as possible. This also accounts for 10% of the market.
3. **Leisure Tourists**: The largest portion of the food tourist market is the leisure tourist, who wants a high-quality food experience as part of their trip, but this is not the primary reason for their travel. This makes up 80% of the market. To this market, food can contribute greatly to the trip and create good memories for the tourists.

Fáilte Ireland aims to create compelling and unique food experiences that not only apply to the 'Culinary Tourists' but also the majority of consumers in the market. This strategy focuses on developing food and drink tourism accessibility and appeal to the best prospective segments across the USA, UK, France, and Germany. To develop food and drink experiences in Ireland the product must be authentic, the story behind it must be distinctive, the service must be of high quality, and the narration must have a unique character. Fáilte Ireland is currently developing tourism development plans that will help to plan and establish a memorable visitor experience for tourists. There are three main food tourism experiences categorised as:

- 1) **Signature or must do experiences** which will draw visitors and often result in an overnight stay. These usually have two key attractions at the core or so-called 'hero products'. Attractions include food festivals and taste events, local food markets, distillery and brewery visits, guided tours etc.
- 2) **Supporting experiences** are not a motivator but can provide a wide range of experiences to do in an area and increase overall traffic by encouraging people to remain in an area.
- 3) **Ancillary experiences** are a range of experiences that consumers will expect an area to have, which include high quality food and drink experiences. Most Irish food tourism is considered to be supporting or ancillary destination experiences.

Memorable food and drink experiences can be broken down to four main categories – authentic & real, high quality produce, close to source, and dynamic food and drink experiences. Providing these experiences is a relatively easy way to amplify local culture through experiences such as long table dining, local sourcing, gourmet fast food, food trucks, slow food, and indoor markets.

Ireland's main challenge in this area is the global perception of Irish food and drink offering. Tourists do not consider Ireland to be a food destination and came to Ireland with low expectations which changed after their trip. They did not view the range of food on offer as extensive and noted that there was a lack of fish on offer. Only 43% of global visitors perceived Ireland as a global food destination and over 70% thought this after their visit to Ireland. **Figure 7** refers to Ireland's main weaknesses for Food Tourism.

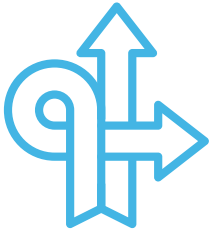
Investment priorities are insights and innovation, strengthening Ireland's appeal to global tourists, creating great visitor experiences, and driving industry capacity by increasing resources.

The Food and Beverage strategy for Co. Wicklow will incorporate the Failte Ireland strategic recommendations.

Many of the key recommendations in The Failte Ireland Food and Drink Strategy 2018-2023 have been used to influence the Wicklow Food and Beverage Strategy set out later in this document.

Figure 7: Ireland's Weaknesses for Food Tourism





Wicklow's food credentials place it well for creating jobs in the food and Agri-space.



6.6.3 Food Tourism & Irelands Ancient East

Part of Irelands Ancient East Strategy aims to include food and drink as part of Irelands experience packages and enhance tourist experiences. Food and drink can be used to deliver on most of Ireland's Ancient East objectives especially those regarding local heritage and Irish culture. This initiative plans to drive growth of international tourist numbers and increase tourism employment in these areas, develop world class visitor experiences, differentiate this area on the international tourism market due to its unique heritage experiences and narrative links that go along with this. It also hopes to increase visitor traffic to hidden gems and well-known sites e.g. Glendalough.

The Failte Ireland and The National Tourism Development Authority plan is currently promoting Wicklow as part of their current strategy in 'Irelands Ancient East Programme'. This is encouraging tourists to visit the Wicklow area through the development of a new umbrella destination brand that encompasses the East of Ireland's rich history with a diverse new range of cultural heritage experiences that relate particularly to the East (and South) of Ireland.

This aims to:

- Drive international visitor numbers
- Move the east of Ireland from a transit and day tripping zone to a destination that attracts large numbers of visitors.

6.6.4 National Action Plan for Jobs

The national action plan for jobs includes reference to the food sector, and its critical role in contributing to jobs. Recommendations within the plan specially refer to the following food initiatives:

'Increase our indigenous exports, including food, to reach €26 billion by 2020 – up by 26% from 2015;

Assist agri-food and drinks companies exporting to the UK to expand alternative markets'

- **Necessary steps for delivery:**
 - Expand Bord Bia programme of market diversification initiatives aimed at helping the agri-food sector to address the market challenges arising from Brexit, including market prioritisation, more resources for promotion and support in UK and international markets, and strengthened strategic marketing processes – Ongoing – Responsible body Bord Bia
 - Bord Bia to maintain support for Marketplace 2018 and broaden focus on emerging markets and to deliver 50% of buyers from non-EU markets – ongoing – Responsible body – Bord Bia
 - Consider the development of potential Brexit response loan schemes for farmers, fishermen and for longer-term capital financing for food businesses; for which DAFM has secured €25 million of funding in 2018 (DAFM & SBCI)

Wicklow's food credentials place it well for creating jobs in the food and Agri-space.



6.6.5 Mid-East Action Plan for Jobs

The Mid-East Action Plan focuses on a number of counties of which Wicklow is one. The action plan also specially focuses on the Food Sector and its importance to job creation.

'The Food sector and the Computer and Electronic Equipment sector are the largest areas of employment within Manufacturing, each representing approximately 30% of Manufacturing employment in the Mid-East region. The Food sector in particular saw significant increases in employment levels between 2007 and 2014, with an additional 1,618 employed in this area by end 2014. Despite job losses, Wholesale/Retail, Manufacturing, and Accommodation and Food Services continued to be the most important sectors in terms of supporting people working in the region.'

The action plan specially mentions some of the following initiatives as examples of benchmark projects:

- **The Boyne Valley Food Hub**
- **The Kerry Group's global technology and innovation centre**
- **Ireland's Ancient East**
- **The Food Academy and Food Start programme**
- **The Food Works Programme**

6.6.6 Origin Green

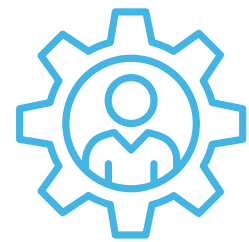
Origin Green is Ireland's voluntary food and drink sustainability programme led by Bord Bia. It encompasses all of the food industry including farmers, food producers, retailers, and food service operators under a common goal of sustainable food production. Origin Green sets measurable and achievable targets to respect the environment and local community.

For food businesses there is a mandatory mix of areas businesses must include:

- Raw material sourcing, manufacturing processes and operations such as energy, water, waste, emissions and bio-diversity.
- Social sustainability, including health and nutrition, community initiatives and employee wellbeing.

For farmers this scheme includes on farm assessments which focus on issues such as greenhouse gas, biodiversity, water measures, energy efficiency, soil management and socio economic factors.

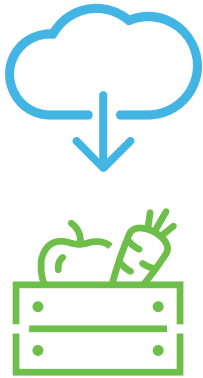
Wicklow with its natural green credentials is well placed to embrace origin green principles.



Wicklow with its natural green credentials is well placed to embrace origin green principles.



7. Food Poverty



Food poverty is typically defined as is the inability to afford, or to have access to, food to make up a healthy diet. It is a type of social injustice, forcing ill health and early death on those affected. Not only does it refer to the quantity of food, but also the quality of it. There are many reasons for the occurrence of food poverty, the prime reason being declining socio-economic status, as well as physical obstacles like proximity to reasonable-priced foods.

The government agency, SafeFood has conducted considerable work in this area and are anxious to support regional initiatives. SafeFood has funded a number of policy documents and research projects on food poverty.

Here are examples, both domestic and global, of initiatives undertaken to combat food poverty:



- **Healthy Food for All:** This is an Irish initiative focused on combatting food poverty by promoting access, availability and affordability of healthy food for low-income groups.
- **Feeding Britain:** The anti-food poverty initiative in Britain strives to provide good quality food for everyone. Its website includes the latest news relating to food poverty, an informative blog, as well as links to donate to the cause.
- **Good Food Oxford:** Oxford's local initiative prides itself on being good for the environment, good for its people, and good for the community. Its three-fold plan ensures everyone has access to affordable, healthy food – while simultaneously being greener.
- **Feed the Future:** This project is a product of the Obama administration which has reached nearly 7 million smallholder farmers with new technologies and protected 12.5 million children from the threat of hunger, poverty, and malnutrition globally.
- **The Good Kitchen:** The Good Kitchen tackles food poverty in England by remodelling the current food system. They look at aspects such as technology, food education, agro-ecology and their roles in the food system.
- **Feeding America:** The Feeding America network is the nation's largest domestic hunger-relief organization, working to connect people with food and end hunger. It depends on both large stakeholders and individual donations to combat food poverty in America.



At local level in Wicklow under the umbrella of 'the Healthy Food Made Easy Programme'. The following initiatives are taking place:

- **Healthy Food Made Easy:** This is a healthy eating course, which runs once a week for up to 6 weeks with each session taking 2-2 1/2 hours. The sessions involve a theory session and a cookery session. The aims of the program are:
 - To encourage healthy eating
 - To improve nutritional knowledge and eating behaviour
 - To empower participants to make healthy, nutritious and economical food choices
 - To reduce diet related illnesses
- **Community Food Initiative:** Each year, the Community Food initiative hopes to improve the eating habits of its participants. It predicts a snowball effect, with participants then influencing their own friends and family – creating the biggest impact possible in the area.
- **Breakfast Clubs:** Breakfast clubs for children in Wicklow have become increasingly popular in recent years, with some schools and youth organisations organising them. The concept behind these clubs is to ensure that local children start their day right by dedicating time to fuelling their minds and bodies.
- **No Fry Zone:** Originally, an initiative started by concerned parents, this has garnered national attention with many counties following suit. Wicklow Councillors banned any future fast-food restaurants being built within a 400 metre radius of schools. This is a protective measure for the health of local children, who would be easily influenced by the price and proximity of such establishments.



The county also supports a number of community cafes in some of the smaller villages where a service is provided in villages, which have lost many of their shops and other centres for communities to meet.



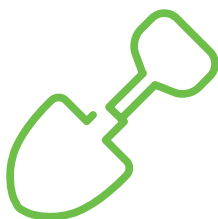
7.1 Food Sustainability

Food waste is an issue in most regions throughout Ireland. Arklow has engaged with Food Cloud to help address some of these issues and find uses for product near to the end of its life. Wicklow County Council recently launched a competition for school children to design a radio advertisement to raise awareness on food waste.



7.2 School Involvement

There are several school initiatives within the county whereby both national and secondary school student embrace food projects. A recent example was a Wicklow based school who partnered with a local chef, the Mystic Celt and created a pop-up restaurant using their own home grown produce.



7.3 Grow your own

There are a number of allotment spaces within the county, and a small number of schools who are also growing produce. An Tairseach in Wicklow town is a good example of a local initiative which promotes horticulture and sustainable living.

8. Key Research Findings

The Following sections set out a summary of the key findings from the stakeholder research, desk research and contributions to the strategy.

8.1 SWOT Analysis



8.2 Wicklow Food Assets

Following consultations with stakeholders and an assessment of the local area, the items below were identified as key assets within the region. Some have already been capitalised on, while others flag as opportunities. A brief overview of each one is provided below.

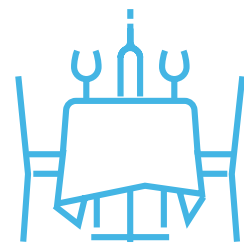
Figure 8: Wicklow Food Assets



8.3 Horizontal Infrastructure (outside the scope of the strategy)

Horizontal infrastructure includes roads, bridges, water pipes, sewer pipes and storm water pipes. There were several issues which emerged which were classed as having an effect on the food landscape, however which were viewed to be outside of the scope of the food strategy. Many stakeholders felt that these must be addressed in parallel to the implementation of the food strategy:

- A shortage of accommodation for staff involved in food production and farm work, and the high cost of accommodation where it is available.
- A shortage of mid-range hotels (the new Wicklow tourism strategy acknowledges this point).
- While it is acknowledged that Wicklow is strategically placed close to major motorway infrastructure, there is a clear recognition that traffic congestion – both in and out of the county – was a barrier.
- Lack of public transport inland for food business employees.
- The lack of chefs and skilled food workers is hampering business growth.



The lack of chefs and skilled food workers is hampering business growth.

8.4 Barriers to Growth of Wicklow Food Businesses

Stakeholders were asked to identify the barriers to growth within their businesses. Those shown below were the barriers most often referenced. Some have been highlighted previously in the SWOT analysis:

- **Food producer/grower Barriers**
 - Have to source ingredients outside of Wicklow as they cannot source sufficient volume from Wicklow.
 - High margin expectations from the supply chain.
 - Lack of education and training in horticulture. Local producers are not growing in sufficient volumes at a cost-effective price.
 - Challenges to get a premium price from Wicklow retailers and consumers.
 - Lack of awareness of Wicklow produced/grown food, amongst Wicklow Foodservice operators.
 - Lack of production units as several producers cannot use share kitchens or premises due to cross contamination.
 - Large producers operate out of unattractive large production units in industrial parks, which are not very attractive for tourists, chefs and journalists to visit.
- **Foodservice Operator Barriers**
 - Lack of chefs with good cookery skills coming out of colleges
 - Rising wage costs
 - Wicklow foodservice operators not working together as one team
 - Not enough events in open venues to showcase Wicklow food
 - Lack of licences for alcohol at Wicklow Festivals and events

Wicklow foodservice operators not working together as one team.

9. Wicklow Food Vision

To help guide the strategy, the following vision statement was created using stakeholder feedback and other inputs;

'County Wicklow to be seen as, a wild and beautiful place, which lends itself to natural and seasonal produce; where food/beverage production and innovation is supported.

To foster a sense of collaboration, networking, and commercial interaction between its food stakeholders. To be the place where business stakeholders are supported to help maximise their commercial opportunities and upscaling locally and nationally, while at the same time ensuring that local food is accessible to all in the community.'



10. Strategic Goals

Having analysed the research gathered for this strategy, and incorporated local stakeholder feedback, 5 goals were identified, under which the strategic implementation will be focussed. A separate action list in which sets out actions, deadlines and budget estimates has been created.

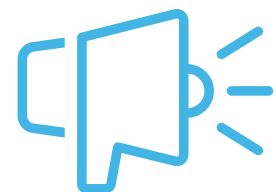
Goal 1: To Tell the Wicklow Food Story

Rationale:

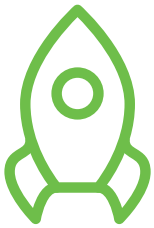
The research for this strategy suggests that Wicklow has a significant food story to communicate both to the local resident, the Irish consumer and the visiting tourist. The objective of this goal is to develop a clear communication strategy which allows the region to take existing strengths and call them out. To develop a Wicklow food brand, with clearly defined communication methods.

Recommended Actions:

- An external brand design agency should be retained to develop a brand positioning and create a brand that represents Wicklow food and beverage. This report has highlighted the following brand values which should be central to the brand development strategy and positioning:
 - Pure and natural credentials
 - Food related heritage
 - A hidden gem of raw ingredients
 - Unspoiled landscape
 - A terroir of its own
 - Driven by food storytellers
- The outputs from the brand design process should be the following:
 - The development of a brand positioning and USP's
 - The creation of a Wicklow food brand name
 - The creation of a logo and possibly sub logos
 - The development of a Wicklow food website
 - The creation of supporting marketing material for the network
 - The creation of a suite of marketing material to support local food provenance initiatives
- A brand toolkit should be created and made available to all Wicklow food stakeholders. This brand toolkit would provide the following to food stakeholders to be used in their own individual marketing and promotional activity:
 - Wicklow based food photographs
 - A library of Wicklow food videos
 - A Wicklow food and beverage logo which could be used as a badge to identify geographic location. Criteria will need to accompany this logo so that it is not seen as a quality control system. It is envisaged that the logo will be used mainly by cafes and restaurants to denote that they are stocking local foods on their menu



A brand toolkit should be created and made available to all Wicklow food stakeholders.



- A program to upskill food stakeholders on how to tell their food story should be put in place to include the following:
 - Specific food focused digital media training for all food stakeholders (not general digital media training)
 - Upskilling and training on how to deal with journalists and bloggers, and how to generate free PR
 - Media training to help food stakeholders perform well when being interviewed
 - Demonstrate to all food stakeholders the importance of entering food awards, and encourage them to do so
- Develop a Wicklow county food communication plan. This plan should be targeted initially at improving the local knowledge of local food, but ultimately it should have an objective of improving Wicklow’s food reputation nationally. Actions should include:
 - Putting in place local media partners
 - Facilitating ‘Journalists on a bus’ type of events
 - Targeting national media with the Wicklow regional food story
- Wicklow has a significant number of food stakeholders who have credibility at national level in the media. These personalities should be encouraged to become ‘local food ambassadors.
- A marketing programme should be developed so as to ensure that there is a coordinated feed of information into the public domain. In particular increased communication around the seasons should be coordinated among all stakeholders. This communication should take its lead from the activities set out in goal 2 To Develop a Food Activity Calendar (Business to Consumer).
- It will be important that separate work streams are developed which encompass the potential to positively impact food poverty for example food producers should be encouraged to engage with those who don’t normally access local food through specific events and tastings as part of the brand development.
- Through engaging with Fáilte Ireland, identify tour operator tradeshows, where Wicklow food tourism providers would showcase the regions food story. Support to attend these shows should be provided.
- Once the branding is developed, and goal two below is in place, County Wicklow should enter Foodie Destinations Ireland.
- At national school level, further to support ‘grow your own’ initiatives and chef led local food education. It is recommended that those involved in current programmes lead this initiative.
- At secondary school level, the Department of Education approved, transition year food programme should be supported and its roll out maximised throughout the county.



Goal 2: To Develop a Food Activity Calendar (Business to Consumer)

Rationale:

One of the challenges for the Wicklow region to date has been that food activities lack coordination and are not part of a 'joined up' marketing initiative. This goal will create a co-ordinated calendar of activity, which will see all existing food activities combined with new events and marketed as a single campaign. This calendar should be run initially over the core summer season but elongated over a 3-year period in order to fill the 'shoulder periods' to create a full year calendar of Wicklow Food Activities. The Boyne Valley Food Series and the Taste the Burren events are benchmark programmes for this goal.

Recommended Actions:

- To establish a sub-group, who will guide this initiative.
- The calendar and marketing programme should umbrella all existing and new events.
- There should be a key focus on getting food involved with non-food events e.g. a breakfast of local food at the Dawn Chorus event, food events tied in with Wicklow Heritage Week etc.
- The initiative will need to be supported by a website and robust social media strategy.
- A generic suite of marketing materials and templates will need to be created and made available to event organisers.
- The initiative should target the local customer, the tourist, and Dublin resident.
- Key criteria must be met to qualify to run an event. See sample list below:
 - All food involved must be Wicklow sourced
 - The event must generate PR for the region
 - Each business will be responsible for promoting their own food event and ensuring attendance is maximised
 - Stakeholders running events should pay a modest fee to contribute to overall costs e.g. €100 per event
- 3-year KPIs should be put in place to track progress. Examples:
 - Number of events run
 - Number of participants attending
 - Food calendar social media reach and activity levels
- In the medium term, a regional approach should be considered for this food activity calendar and possibly combine with other counties to broaden its appeal.
- It will be important that a number of the annual events under this calendar of activity include supporting initiatives which address food poverty by adopting recommendations from SafeFood 'Decent food for All Intervention'. These recommendations state that projects should strengthen health education initiatives address local issues, enable community engagement and support local teamworking.
- For this calendar to succeed funding will need to be put in place.



- Themes for new events and activities will need to be generated. Some suggested themes which emerged during the strategy formation are as follows:
 - A venison and game festival
 - A Wicklow foraged food week
 - Honey celebration activities
 - An open farm event based on lambing season
- A big opportunity exists to insure that some of these food and beverage events are themed around Irelands Ancient East and the region is perfectly positioned to dominate the food part of Irelands Ancient East within the wider region. It is recommended that at least 4 annual events are themed around the topic.



Goal 3: To Increase Food Stakeholder Networking (Business to Business)

Rationale:

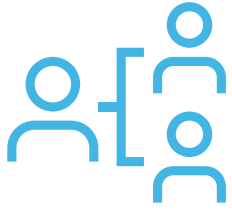
Many Wicklow Food stakeholders reported during the research phase that they were not aware of all other food stakeholders within the region.

The objective of this goal is to build a Wicklow Food Community, to improve networking and local food commerce, and to educate and upskill food producers in the area.

Recommended Actions:

- A regional approach should be considered with regard to the network (Wicklow may not be large enough on its own to support network events and collaborating with a neighbouring county should be considered). Discussions should take place with the Dublin LEO's to explore if there is a willingness for Wicklow food and beverage to join DFC events for some of the calendar of activity, while still retaining some Wicklow based bespoke events.
- This network should have a business to business focus only.
- Membership should be free, with participants only paying a nominal fee (€15) for the events they attend.
- The role of network manager should be part of a wider Food Development Manager role (see reference to Food Development Manager later).
- Each year 5 events should be hosted;
 - Events should equally appeal to food producers, food service producers and food tourism operators
 - One event per year should be a producer showcase where all local producers and farmers display their produce, and chefs and store owners visit
 - Events should alternate between smaller breakfast events and larger evening seminars
 - Consideration should be given to one event taking the form of a familiarisation trip to other foodie regions, e.g. Kilkenny, West Cork etc.
- A target audience of 50 attendees for each event should be in place.





A local Wicklow 'signature dish' should be developed and commitment sought from foodservice operators to all have this dish on their menu.

Goal 4: Get Local Food to Local Consumers

Rationale:

Many stakeholders commented that in many cases Wicklow Food is not seen on local menus, and on local shelves as often as it should be. The objective of this goal is to increase the visibility and commercial activity around local food being available to purchase.

Recommended Actions:

- Develop an affiliate scheme to include local retailers and foodservice operators. These scheme would have as its objective to get more local food onto local menus and retail shelves. There are already some good schemes operating in both Donegal and Wexford where local foodservice operators are allowed to display a symbol showing that they are dedicated to supporting local ingredients/products.
- An education program for chefs etc should be put in place to demonstrate the commercial prize to be gained from local sourcing
- A directory of local producers/growers/farmers should be created. This directory should be available in hard and soft copy and its launch should coincide with the first producer showcase as part of the Wicklow food network
- Strict qualifying criteria for the affiliate program will need to be put in place in order to prevent misuse. In some other regions the producers are used to monitor the level of local sourcing by foodservice operators
- A local Wicklow 'signature dish' should be developed and commitment sought from foodservice operators to all have this dish on their menu. The core ingredients for the dish should reflect the local terroir and inspiration for ingredients should be guided by the Wicklow food assets. Ideally local beverages should be suggested to accompany this dish
- Staff training programs should be provided by retailers and foodservice operators stocking local foods so that they are able to add 'experiential elements' to the storytelling
- Local government offices should be challenged to have local food on their menus. This has been achieved by Meath County Council in their Navan office where over 300 staff enjoy on a daily basis locally sourced food in the staff restaurant
- A suite of support marketing materials should be created to boost effectiveness of communicating local stories;
 - The new Wicklow food and beverage logo
 - Support with menu writing skills to highlight provenance
 - Photographs of local producers to be used by the retailers and foodservice operators on their digital media platforms
 - Posters, leaflets etc explaining about the local food landscape
- An event should be run which allows local boat owners/fisherman to meet local food operators, chefs etc. A contact list of those buying and those selling should be generated and circulated
- A similar initiative should be run to connect game and venison sources and front-end operators. A contact list of those buying and those selling should be generated and circulated

- When the project being supported by the Wicklow Maritime Group is at a more advanced stage, mussel and oyster products should be launched into the local market in a structured way accompanied by recipe idea information, chef training sessions, etc.
- Create a work stream to highlight existing allotments and other 'grow it yourself' initiatives. Ensure these schemes are supported through the creation of awareness and possibly further allotment space if required. Link this initiative to healthy Wicklow work streams
- Create a 'Markets' sub group to work on developing local farmers and food markets within the County. This subgroup should be made up of stakeholders representing the markets whose role would be as follows;
 - To provide an overview of trading at current markets and an assessment of the viability to the stallholders
 - To assess the needs for any additional supports necessary to enable the more effective operation of markets
 - To determine the role that markets can play to improve social inclusion, and to assist with food poverty objectives

Goal 5: To provide appropriate business supports

Rationale:

This goal endeavours to ensure that the correct physical infrastructure and business upskilling supports are in place to help food businesses grow and develop. The objective of this goal is to position Wicklow as a great place to start and grow a food business.

Recommended Actions:

- A training needs analysis should be conducted across all food stakeholders to identify skillset gaps. Training courses and other supports should be put in place on the back of this needs analysis. The training needs analysis should be conducted on the following groups;
 - Food producers large and small
 - Foodservice operators
 - Food tourism operators
 - Farmers and growers

Possible training topics arising from information gathered during the strategy formation include the following;

- Training chefs in the importance of using local foods
- Training to help food producers understand the needs of the local foodservice and retail stakeholders
- Route to market training for food producers (beyond the Food Academy to cover other multiple retailers and foodservice operators)
- A feasibility study should be conducted to determine the demand for new incubation units of 500sq feet to 2000sq feet. Several food stakeholders indicated a need for this. Included in the feasibility study should be the determination of the possible location of these units at the current New Market Kitchen site as there may be synergy's as producers upscale.





The feasibility study should also consider the role of a Food Development Kitchen which might have some of the following services;

- o Fulltime in house food developer/technologist
- o A test kitchen for product development
- o A co-ordinated approach to external testing (better rates and specifications negotiated)
- Consideration should also be given to providing specialist 'super mentors' e.g. Food safety specialists, food product developers etc., these mentors would be available on a subsidised basis to help improve business performance in the region
- The county is characterised by larger successful food businesses and emerging small to medium food stakeholders. A number of clusters should be established to promote knowledge transfer between those further down the road and those starting out. This could take the form of a number of facilitated cluster meetings to promote increased cooperation between the stakeholder groups. It is envisaged that there would be one cluster for foodservice and one for food producers with the possibility of creating a grower/farmer group if the need was identified
- Work streams focused on scaling up existing small and medium producers should be prioritised. These work streams should include the following;
 - o The identification of producers deemed to be ready to scale up and the provision of specific mentoring and programmes for these groups
 - o The creation of a 'health check' tool to identify food and beverage producers in Wicklow ready for scaling up
 - o Specific training targeted at upskilling food and beverage producers identified as part of the 'health check' above (it will be important that this is a food specific group).

The following topics should be considered as part of this training;

- Owner manager skillsets
- Wider management team skillsets
- Sources of funding available to help the business scale up
- Technology and other system enablers
- Building a robust sales and marketing process;
 - o A review in partnership with Enterprise Ireland to see if any of these producers qualify for HPSU status

11. Facilitating Action Plan Implementation

It has been proven in other regions that where structure, funding and a dedicated recourse are put in place, food strategies are implemented more effectively. Therefore, this report recommends that the following should be viewed as 'must have' supports in order to give the strategy maximum chance of success.

- The formation of a strategy steering group, who would agree to remain in place for a minimum of one year and who's role would be to guide the strategy implementation
- The makeup of this steering group should be representative of the industry and its makeup could be as follows;
 - One early stage food producer
 - One larger experienced food producer
 - One foodservice operator
 - One food tourism operator
 - Representative of Wicklow County Council
 - Representative of Local enterprise office Wicklow
 - Representative of Wicklow partnership
 - Representative of Wicklow tourism
 - Representative of the farming/growing community
 - A Representative voice for the topics of food poverty, sustainability and environmental issues
 - The chairperson should preferably be a high profile person from within the local food community. They should be respected by others, and have the ability to push the steering group and the local authority in order to ensure the strategy is delivered
- The full steering group should meet quarterly
- The Steering Group should be broken into sub-groups. Each sub-group should be responsible for the implementation of different parts of the strategy. Ideally there should be a sub-group for each goal with a number of those on the steering group possibly sitting on a few sub-groups. The sub-groups will need to meet monthly at the beginning





- A suitable chairperson for the steering group will need to be nominated. The role of the chair will be key to the success of the strategy roll out and the selection criteria for the chair ideally should contain some of the following traits;
 - Be associated with the food sector in Wicklow and or at national level
 - Be respected by the food producer and foodservice operator cohorts
 - Be respected by local agencies connected with food
 - Own and operate a food or beverage business within the county
 - Have some previous experience dealing with local government
- Training for the steering group should be provided at the start, to help with items like the management and structure of the group itself, complying with legal requirements, dispute resolution techniques, etc.
- A Food Development Manager should be contracted externally for a period of 24 months. The role of this person is to facilitate and support the implementation of the strategy.

Their role would include;

- Ensuring that the strategy is implemented systematically
- Provide communication between all stakeholders with updates on progress
- Act as a central 'go to' point for the Wicklow food landscape
- Act as a catalyst to join those running initiatives together with possible funders
- It will not be the Food Development Managers role to get bogged down in implementation. The implementation should be done by industry stakeholders and others





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