

Proposal: FeedingManchester Sustainable Food Website

Background – Demonstrating need

In Summer 2009 we carried out research identifying obstacles and potential solutions for the local food movement in Greater Manchester. One of the solutions which came up repeatedly in interviews was the idea of a 'one-stop-shop' website about sustainable food as an important tool in addressing the following problems.

For producers

- Lack of experience/skills/finance to successfully market produce
- The need for new short-term markets with a quick turn around (to deal with gluts)
- Lack of co-ordination with other growers, which means flooding of the market for certain vegetables (lowering prices), while others are unavailable locally
- Lack of co-ordination on deliveries means that smaller orders are not cost effective

For buyers

- Lack of time to research what producers are out there
- Lack of info on producers - finding reliable, local businesses that fit ethical criteria
- Availability (includes lack of producers)/lack of variety
- Increased complexity of dealing with multiple small producers

For community groups

- Lack of knowledge about other projects in the local area
- Lack of co-ordination between groups over funding opportunities
- Lack of marketing for potential new volunteers

For consumers

- Lack of awareness about what is in season locally
- Lack of information about the importance of sustainable food and where to buy it

Scope of the website

A Sustainable Food Directory

Based on the Directory developed by kindling and available at Kindling.org.uk/directory, providing a database searchable by geographical area, interest or product area.



From the database each organisation will have their own page displaying information specific to the organisation type.

Use Cases:

a) A householder looking for organic food in their area, would search food retailers and be shown the nearest options, opening hours,

types of food sold and any specific dietary requirements they cater for.

b) Someone interested in volunteering, could find community projects in their area, what they do, what type of volunteers they are looking for and could even contact the project directly from the website.

c) A play-scheme looking to source bulk fresh fruit and veg could search by product type and find growers or delivery schemes in their area.

Public information store

Additionally building on the work done for 'Growing Manchester' an on-line repository of useful information for community projects and individuals interested in sustainable food. This will also include information and interesting articles about sustainable food and the different issues involved (e.g. ideas for eating more sustainably, comparing different food types, examples of sustainable food projects etc.).

Private user area

As well as the public area there will be a members area, where organisations listed on the site will be able to login and access a range of additional resources. For example organisations will be able to specify resources that they have available to share (such as vehicles and cold storage), as well as mapping out delivery routes and times. The hope of this is to encourage greater co-ordination between enterprises, as we're already beginning to see with the Manchester organic growers & buyers group.

- Forum - where issues can be discussed, help requested, potential partnership funding proposals outlined etc.
- Resource area - for useful publications, Manchester specific information, Funding opportunities etc.

Data management and ownership

The system we are developing allows groups to login and manage their own information on the website. We feel this is important in order to:

- Reduce (and eventually remove) the need for central administration (and therefore ongoing costs).
- Make the site independent of any particular individual, organisation or project, due to our experience of similar sites disappearing as funding dries up or projects come to an end.
- Create a feeling of ownership by the groups that make up the site, encouraging the idea of common movement.
- Keep the site more up-to-date and relevant.

Technical Specifications.

We will use only mature free and open-source software solutions due to the following advantages:

- Costs can be minimised and planned ahead
- Make the project easily replicable by other local organisations
- Guarantee the longevity of the project by keeping all data in a format that is easily exportable and usable by others.
- Any new features that we develop will be given back to the software project for the benefit of all users, this not only makes it easier to share costs with external organisations but fits well with our cooperative values.

Drupal - is a free web content management solution that allows a community of users to easily publish, manage and organize a wide variety of content on a website. Hundreds of thousands of organizations are using software and contributing to its development. Some of its features include:

- Collaborative authoring of 'best practice' documents
- Forums
- Peer-to-peer networking
- Newsletters and mailing lists
- Events advertising
- Media galleries (to better share resources)
- File uploads and downloads (central repository)
- There is also E-commerce functionality should be wish to explore this at a later date

CiviCRM - is a free, open source constituent relationship management solution designed specifically to meet the needs of advocacy, non-profit and non-governmental groups. It allows you to record and manage information about your various constituents including volunteers, activists, donors, employees, community groups, businesses, etc. Track and execute donations, transactions, conversations, events or any type of correspondence with each constituent and store it all in one, easily accessible and manageable source. CiviCRM is created by an open source community coordinated a non-profit Social Source Foundation and used by a range of organisations from organic growers to human rights organisations.

Timescale

We would aim for a launch on Valentines day 2011, following the positive reaction to our previous "Love your local farmer" campaign in 2009. In order to meet this ambitious deadline we would need to have the site ready for users to add and amend details by the first week of the new year. We are confident that given the budget above we could meet this deadline, if we are able to get the go ahead by the second week of October 2010.

Replicability

All software and data is freely available to allow the project to be replicated in other localities. Full details of the process, software and implementation will be published on the site itself.