

“There is an increasing opportunity for operators to take advantage of this trend when it comes to drinks as well”



THE MARKETEEER
CHRIS HOLDEN

LOOKING OUT FOR A LOCAL HERO

The Marketeer asks if operators really make the most of using local ingredients and suppliers

During the spring and summer months I have the pleasure of attending various food and drink festivals up and down the country. While they almost all have their merits, probably the one which stood out the most for me this year was in the little village of Lytchett Minster, just outside Poole. On 29 April the local community put on its third Dorset Food and Venison Festival.

What struck me most was the sheer joy and enthusiasm by both exhibitors, and those lucky enough to attend, to promote, sample and enjoy their local produce. I was also pleasantly surprised by the range and diversity of what was on offer. Not just venison, as one might have assumed from the title, but an array of locally-baked breads, cheeses and other meats. Not to mention some rather pleasant ciders, which had the added bonus of trying before you buy. Something I certainly took advantage of!

As well as the various stalls selling local produce, the festival also had chefs from a couple of local hotels providing hands-on demonstrations on how to get the best out of what was available locally.

I think we all recognise the massive

increase in people's desire for more locally-produced and sourced ingredients. However, it did get me thinking as to whether certain operators are doing enough to tap into this trend.

SO WHAT IS LOCAL?

One of the first things you need to establish is when and how can you use the term 'local'? Unsurprisingly, there doesn't seem to be any hard or fast rules on what this actually means and if you look across the industry you will often see people using the term very loosely indeed. That said, I have come across some guidelines from my local council which are intended to help businesses decide if their menus (and other forms of communication) are keeping to the spirit as to what 'local' should mean: "A food or ingredient may be described as 'local' if it is sold within the supplying establishment's own county plus the greater of either the neighbouring county or counties or 30 miles from the boundary of the supplying establishment's county."

What I like about this is that it helps make allowance for any imbalance between closely spaced urban authorities and widely spaced remote populations,



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as well as those on the boundaries or bordered by the sea.

In an ideal world it would be great, should you wish, to be able to claim that most of your ingredients were 'local'. However, simple geography or what's on your menu may not enable you to do that. If this is a situation you find yourself in, then one way to address this is to use the term 'locally-sourced' instead.

"A food or ingredient may be described as 'locally sourced' if it is obtained from a supplier within the supplying establishment's own county plus the greater of either the neighbouring county or counties or 30 miles from the boundary of the supplying establishment's county."

The big watch out here is not to use the term in circumstances which are clearly misleading, as this will simply alienate the very customers you are trying to appeal to.

IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT FOOD

When it comes to restaurants and other eating establishments, when we talk about local or locally-sourced, in most cases we immediately think about food. However, there is an increasing opportunity for operators to take advantage of this

trend when it comes to both alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks.

Although exact numbers vary, it is generally accepted that there are over 1,800 small breweries or microbrewers operating in the UK at this point in time. Although some areas have a higher concentration than others, it's probably not wrong to suggest that based on the definitions above almost every casual dining operator will have a selection of local brewers from which they could source at least some of their beers. While it is fair to say that in the past many of these microbrewers have only produced cask versions of their beers, which some operators would have not been geared up to deal with, this is now changing. With the growth in craft beer many smaller brewers are now offering their beers in packaged form, be that bottles or cans. This provides operators with a great opportunity to stock locally-produced beers with a minimum of fuss and risk. If sales take off there will often be the opportunity to move to draught at a later date.

In addition to beer, the last few years has also seen a rise in the number of local distilleries. Official figures from HM

Revenue and Customs show there were 273 licensed UK distilleries at the end of 2016. This has doubled since 2010 and is said to have been driven by the growth in 'boutique' distilleries. Many of these distilleries only produce quite small batches, which in turn provide a great opportunity for operators to drive retail value off the back of the exclusive nature of the gins and whiskies being offered.

DON'T FORCE IT

Although many customers will look to seek out those establishments which offer local or locally-sourced food and drink there will also still be many who don't. My advice on this is only go down the local route if it is right for you and your customers. The worst of all worlds is to try and offer something which a) your customers don't really want and b) you can't really deliver.

So, for goodness sake, don't describe New Zealand lamb purchased from a local butcher as 'locally-sourced'! 