

8.2.99 RUNNING ORDER

1. Hello, can I draw your attention to the fire regulations on the overhead projector and point out the fire exits on your left and in the corner of the lobby.

Good morning and **welcome** to this conference to discuss opportunities for helping to develop the locally-grown food sector. Part of this process is intended to **celebrate** locally-grown food, so I'd like to take this opportunity to **congratulate** everyone who is already a local food producer and encourage you all to **grow more**.

This **afternoon**, we have a presentation from the Soil Association and a chance to find out more about the **Food Futures** programme. This **morning**, we have time to discuss what's **already** happening here in Sheffield, understand each others' **perspectives** and discuss what can be done to **develop** the local food sector at all levels.

The sessions are fairly long, so if you get thirsty during either session, please feel free to go into the lobby where **drinks** are available.

I'd like to briefly explain **how** this conference came about and **what** it might achieve. Put simply, it seems like the right time to raise the **profile** of the locally-grown food **economy** and **culture**. Hardly a day goes by when there isn't some **issue** in the news relating to food; from the depression in many parts of agriculture to public health and safety issues. Or alternatively, promoting the health and nutritional benefits of fresh, naturally-grown produce. The conditions seem to be right for a new **consensus** which could bring together producers, consumers and everyone who is interested in fresh, healthy food that they can trust. Locally-grown food has the potential to generate a huge range of social benefits, from preventative health to sustainable regeneration.

So without further ado, I'd like to introduce this morning's speakers.

INTRODUCE SPEAKERS

Each speaker will talk for about **five** minutes, then answer questions and lead a short discussion about the issues they've raised for another **ten** minutes.

We want **everyone** to have a chance to speak so could you clearly tell us all **who** you are, **why** you have an interest in local food and then make your **point**.

2.

3. WIND-UP

Before we break for lunch, I'd like to make a few **announcements**--

We've put together a questionnaire to start collecting information for a **database**. Could you please hand them round. There's a special free gift attached, a packet of heritage kale seeds, locally-grown of course. If anybody just wants the form or would like to take one to pass on to someone else, there are some spare copies without seeds **here**. This form is quite detailed, but it would be very helpful if you could fill it in by the end of the day and leave it in the **box** on the information table in the lobby. If you want to take it home and fill it in at your leisure, that's fine, just send it to one of the addresses at the bottom.

For anyone who's interested in or already involved in community gardening or food-growing project, can I point out two **grants** which are available. Locally, the Healthy Gardening Group is offering grants of up to £ 250 and nationally, the community Gardens Network is offering grants of up to £ 200 specifically for food-growing projects. Application forms available on the tables in the lobby.

If anyone is interested in registering as Organic with the S.A., we would like to start a **group** certification scheme which is much cheaper than going it alone. This scheme was developed especially for small-scale growers. Please see myself or Darrell if you're interested.

If anyone has not yet seen the explanation of the Food Futures programme, this **yellow** handout, there are copies available on the information table in the lobby.

LUNCH

We have quite a **long** time for lunch, which means there's **no rush**. Can I encourage you to use this time to mingle, meet each other and talk. During lunch there will be **videos** in the main hall, but please remember that you can only eat in the **lobby** area.

2. MY SPEAK

Hello again. I'm Richard Clare of Sheffield Organic Food Initiative and I'm here because I think local growers deserve more support.

I've been a local grower for the last **ten** years. When I began, I was motivated by wanting to eat as much organic food as possible, grown in the most environmentally-friendly way possible. At that time, organic food was expensive and I wanted to save money, but also the supply was less reliable than it is now, even for seasonal staples. Supply is now a lot more reliable and the cost has gone down, but the vast majority of commercial organic produce is imported from abroad.

After ten years' practice, I've learnt how to grow a huge range of vegetables, fruits, nuts and herbs to a good standard. For the past five years, I've been cultivating nearly **two** acres, made up of eight allotments and a large kitchen garden. I manage to grow more than **two** tonnes of food per year, which is about **half** the food I eat. I would love to become a commercial market gardener one day, if I could access more land and resources.

Currently, there seems to be a great need for basic help and advice, which is currently not offered by the education and training sector, so I've spent a lot of time helping and supporting **dozens** of people get started. I've recently obtained funding to allow me to set up a training course to help local people learn to grow their own organic food.

With my colleague, Darrell Maryon, we are setting up a charitable educational trust, Sheffield Organic Food Initiative, to promote organics for the relief of **poverty** and its benefits to **health**. From my point of view, fresh organic food should be seen as a basic **necessity** rather than an unaffordable luxury. For communities and group food-growing projects, organic techniques may seem to involve more hard work, but they are **safer**, more **appropriate** for small-scale production and more likely to be **successful** in the long run.

It's vital to state clearly that the word organic is a **relative**, **not** an absolute term. It's not something which is black and white. If a commercial producer wants to sell organic produce, there are strict criteria that must be met, but for small-scale, amateur growers, it's sufficient to be **as organic as possible**. Many small producers are already using a foundation of common sense, organic cultivation techniques and are beginning to see that it is possible to omit the chemicals they do use, so that they can make more profit selling certified organic produce of all kinds.

The market demand for organic produce is currently increasing by **100%** every year, so there is a realistic prospect that smallholders and farmers will be able to make a living growing organically. The amount of land registered as organic in Britain is also currently doubling annually, **60,000** hectares going into conversion last year.

The majority of people I meet who are starting allotments are motivated by wanting to grow their own supply of organic food. Allotments are still the only way that most people can get access to enough land to grow a meaningful amount of food. At present, it's often a heroic struggle to clear neglected and derelict plots. A lot of beginners give up, but those that succeed in these adverse conditions could achieve so much more with greater support and resources.

We have developed a **pragmatic** and **realistic** perspective based on our experience of all the problems and difficulties involved in starting to grow your own. We've met dozens of people who would have been much more likely to succeed if they had access to the information, support and resources to match their commitment.

As a culture, allotments have been under-valued and under-used for decades. There are so many other forms of leisure and entertainment to distract the allotmenter nowadays, but the rewards and satisfaction of cultivating your own plot of land are as fulfilling as ever.

As well as increasing the output of locally-grown food, I think that a revitalised allotment culture could generate a huge range of **personal and social benefits** for all types of community, especially for economically-deprived and -excluded members of society.

4. INTRO. F.F.

I'll leave it up to Joy, Jade and Naomi to fill you in on the **details** of the Food Futures programme, but first I'd just like to briefly describe what has **already** happened to try to get the project up and running here in Sheffield. There have been two small **meetings** to discuss the project outline and consider what **benefits** it could bring to Sheffield. Sheffield Organic Food Initiative has raised some funds to pay for work to develop and support Food Futures, **one** day a week. We've put a bid in to pay for the costs of the workshops and are investigating how to raise further funds.

I think Food Futures could provide an all-inclusive process which would involve all sectors and be a way of turning the consensus view about the benefits of fresh, locally-grown food into tangible **actions** which will support local food producers and projects.

5. END

We have arranged for a **follow-up** meeting for anyone who would like to help organise and coordinate Food Futures in Sheffield, at the **Old Town Hall on Tuesday March the second at three o'clock**. We would like people representing as many different types of local food activity as possible to get involved in the **core** group and the **action** groups. It would be useful if we have some idea of how many people are likely to attend, so could you put your hand up if you're interested in attending this follow-up meeting. Thank you, and the date for your diary again is Tuesday, March 2nd at 3 p.m. at the Old Town Hall

Thank you all for attending.