

# FACTFILE: GCE NUTRITION & FOOD SCIENCE

## FOOD SUSTAINABILITY



### Food sustainability

#### Learning outcome

- Explain how the following contribute positively to local economies in the UK and producer countries:
  - locally and seasonally produced food; and
  - Fairtrade

#### Course content

According to Sustain, healthy and sustainable food should be, produced, processed, bought, sold and eaten in ways that:

- provide social benefits
  - contribute to thriving local economies that create good jobs and secure livelihoods, both in the UK and, in the case of imported produce, in producer countries
  - enhance health and variety of plants and animals
  - protect natural resources
  - help to tackle climate change
- (The Sustain Guide to Good Food, 21.06.2013)



### Local and seasonally produced food

#### Local food

There is no universal definition of local food, but it is generally considered to be food grown or produced, processed, traded and sold within a geographical radius of 30-50 miles. Local food is used to describe a method of food production and distribution that is geographically localised, rather than national and/or international. Food is grown and harvested close to consumers' homes, then distributed over much shorter distances than is common in the conventional global industrial food system.

[www.sustainabletable.org](http://www.sustainabletable.org)



## Seasonal food

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' (DEFRA) starting point for the definition of 'in season food' is 'food that is outdoor grown or produced during the natural growing/production period for the country or region where it is produced.'

### How does local and seasonal food contribute positively to local economies?

Evidence indicates that local food systems support local economies, for example farmers' markets positively affect the businesses surrounding them, while also providing significant sources of income for local farmers, thus maintaining the viability of many small, local farms. In addition food grown locally, processed locally and distributed locally generates jobs and subsequently helps stimulate local economies. [www.sustainabletable.org](http://www.sustainabletable.org)

According to Friends of the Earth (EWNI) local food, bought in farmers' markets, is good for the local economy because:

- more money is spent in the local economy, and it circulates in the locality for longer
- there is a high knock-on spending on other shops on market days
- they provide an outlet for local produce, helping to start new local businesses and expand existing ones
- they reinforce local job and business networks, maintaining local employment

[\(Friends of the Earth \(EWNI\) The Economic Benefits of Farmers' Markets\)](#)

Similarly Brighter Futures Together states that the economic benefits of local food are:

- it retains money in the local community
- it ensures income goes to the producer
- it reverses the decline of rural services
- it increases sustainable enterprises and job creation

[www.brighterfuturestogether.co.uk](http://www.brighterfuturestogether.co.uk)

According to the Sustainable Restaurant Association farming contributes more than £8.6 billion to the UK economy every year. Purchasing food grown in season is more likely to support the local economy than buying food out of season.

[www.thesra.org](http://www.thesra.org)

Plugging the Leaks, a study by the New Economics Foundation shows that spending £10 in a local organic box scheme results in a £25.90 investment



in the local economy. This is because a high percentage of the £10 is re-spent locally and of this, a high proportion is spent locally again, thus having a multiplying effect. If the food supply chain becomes more localised, a higher proportion of the financial and employment benefits would accrue to the producer and the local area. Fifty years ago UK farmers received 50 pence in every pound that consumers spent on food. Today they receive about 10 pence. The rest of the value is now captured upstream, mostly away from rural areas, by processors, distributors and global retailers.

## Fairtrade

Mainstream global trade often discriminates against the poorest people in the poorest countries. Prices in global food markets are very volatile, and farmers planting crops take a risk that the price may have fallen by the time they reach harvest. Most international trade in food is funnelled through a few big companies, and if prices go up they often keep the profits rather than passing on any of the benefit to farmers. Usually poor farmers also need to buy food, so they are affected by price rises, just like other consumers. The consequences can be devastating for both poor farmers and agricultural labourers. With few, if any, other employment opportunities open to them, and no welfare state to fall back on, many farmers are unable to afford basic necessities, such as food for their families, healthcare and education for their children. Labourers on plantations fare little better, often facing gruelling hours, low pay, no job security, unpleasant or downright dangerous living and working conditions, sexual harassment and serious health problems resulting from the use of hazardous farm chemicals. Many plantation workers have been prevented from joining trade unions by intimidation and sometimes physical violence. (The Sustain Guide to Good Food)

## How does Fairtrade contribute positively to local economies?

According to the Fairtrade Foundation, Fairtrade is about better prices, decent working conditions and fair terms of trade for farmers and workers. It's about supporting the development of thriving farming and worker communities to have more control over their futures. When consumers buy products with the Fairtrade mark it means that the ingredients in the product have been produced by small scale farmer organisations or plantations that meet Fairtrade economic standards. The standards include payment of the Fairtrade minimum price and an additional Fairtrade premium to invest in business or community projects. Fairtrade offers rural families the stability of income, which enables them to plan for the future. In plantations, employers must pay wages that progress towards living wage benchmarks. The producers themselves decide how the Fairtrade premium should be invested. This additional sum of money can be invested in economic developmental projects to improve their businesses and the community. In real terms it means investment in schools, transport, health care, sanitation, an improved environment and better business equipment.

The Fairtrade minimum price is set to cover the cost of sustainable production. If the market price for that product is higher than the minimum price then producers should receive the market price. Payment of the minimum price is regularly audited. This acts as a vital safety net for farmers and workers



and protects them from fluctuations in the market prices of the products that they grow for a living. This protection ensures they can have an assured and stable income and plan for their future.

Fairtrade indirectly stimulates the local economy through improving incomes and generating business for agricultural markets and services.

Agriculture can play a critical role in the economic development of developing countries – up to one and a half million livelihoods in Africa alone are estimated to be dependent upon UK consumption of agricultural and horticultural produce. Increased agricultural growth is thought to be the most likely source of economic growth in Africa, given that 70 per cent of its rural poor work on the land. Fairtrade certification ensures that the benefits of agriculture accrue to marginalised and disadvantaged producers. [www.fairtrade.org.uk](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk)



## Revision Questions

- 1 Explain how buying Fairtrade products contributes positively to local economies in the producer countries.
- 2 Consumers choosing to purchase local and seasonal food contribute positively to local economies. Discuss this statement.

