



Rochford District Council

To the Meeting of: ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SUB-COMMITTEE
On: 12 JANUARY 2000
Report of: HEAD OF CORPORATE POLICY AND INITIATIVES
Title: FARMERS MARKETS
Author: Nicola Shorten Report approved by

Introduction

Farmers' Markets are intended to enable local producers to sell their goods directly to consumers in a way which promotes dialogue and understanding. They also enable high quality produce to be affordable while generating a fair income for producers. Farmers' Markets promote a more sustainable society by reducing "food miles", assisting in the sale and marketing of food produced to high environmental and welfare standards, and reconnecting consumers with the farming community that surrounds and serves them.

The purpose of this agenda item is to propose the holding of a trial Farmers' Market within the Rochford town centre (Woman's Institute Hall), during the summer of 2000. A trial period of once a month for three months is suggested.

Background

The growth in farmers' markets in the U.K. has been rapid. In March 1998, the Bath Council's farmers' market was the lone market in Britain - and a great success. Next year over 80 markets are scheduled, mostly in market towns.

Farmers' Markets enable farmers and other producers to sell their own fruit, vegetables, eggs, cheeses, flowers, honey, crafts, meat and other farm products directly to the public. No one may purchase produce for resale, and all farms must be within a defined local area (usually 30 miles). Markets can occur weekly, fortnightly or monthly, and it is suggested that the Rochford farmers market be held monthly.

Farmers markets can benefit the farmers, consumers, the environment, and can assist in the regeneration of town centres, as follows:

Farmers and other producers benefit as they take the full retail price for products. Small and medium-sized farms tend to benefit most because farmers' markets absorb their uneven supply - unlike large distributors and supermarkets. Farmers' markets are also considered to be good farm policy: they raise farm income without subsidy and keep the countryside economically productive. By getting to know consumers, farmers can counter public lack of knowledge about agricultural issues.

In relation to the **environment**, food miles are reduced, packaging is minimal, and produce isn't stored in warehouses, so less is wasted. Although markets seldom require farmers to use 'environmentally friendly' methods, consumers tend to push growers in that direction. Farmers who might otherwise hesitate to switch to organic production, for example, often because conversion is costly, have an immediate, local market.

Shoppers have access to fresh, local food and they can ask farmers directly about how it's grown. In food shopping, most consumers have little control over the market, whereas at farmers' markets, the farmer/retailer is responsive to consumer demands.

Prices are often lower at farmers' markets, because there is no middleman and overhead costs are low

Farmers' markets have the potential to help revive market towns and run-down urban centres. Often despite initial resistance, local shop owners find that markets actually serve to increase their business. If the concept of a farmers market to be held within Rochford town centre is approved, then local retailers will be consulted.

National Association of Farmers' Markets

A National Association of Farmers' Markets (NAFM) has been established, and is in the process of developing arrangements whereby markets can be accredited. Farmers' Markets which abide by the NAFM criteria (through an annual inspection, combined with possible unannounced visits) are then allowed to use the term 'Farmers Market'.

The following criteria have been developed by the NAFM:

1. Locally Produced: Only producers from the local area are allowed to sell their produce. Usually this is producers within a 30 mile radius of the market, enclosing a total area of around 3000 square miles.
2. Own Produce: All produce sold must originate from the defined radius. This means that:
 - for primary produce, it has spent at least 50% of its life on the producers land, or land the producer rents;
 - for processed meat and vegetable products, the principal ingredient is primary produce as defined above;
 - for cakes, biscuits, marmalade etc, the products have been made within the defined radius;
 - for crafts, the products have been made within the defined radius.

3. Principal Producer: The stall shall be attended by the principal producer so that it is clear to customers that they are in a direct relationship with him or her.
4. Policy and Information: The market should produce, and make available at each market, their policy for encouraging more sustainable food production, for example by giving priority to production systems involving lower intensity.

Producers must produce clear written information about production methods, which shall be available to any to any customer who requests it. The market must also publicise the availability of this information.

For the time being, markets should also include a policy that no genetically modified organisms are knowingly sold or included in products sold at the market.

5. Other Rules: Markets may establish other criteria in addition to the above provided they do not conflict with them

Note: While the criteria should be closely followed, not all circumstances can be allowed for and exceptions are considered where a case can be made.

Environmental Implications

As stated above, food miles are reduced, packaging is minimal, and produce isn't stored in warehouses, so less is wasted. Although markets seldom require farmers to use 'environmentally friendly' methods, consumers tend to push growers in that direction. Farmers who might otherwise hesitate to switch to organic production, for example, often because conversion is costly, have an immediate, local market.

Parish Implications

If the concept of a farmers market within Rochford town centre is approved, the Rochford Parish Council will be involved in a consultation exercise.

Financial Implications

Farmers' markets cost little to start and administer, and once a market is established, publicity tends to take care of itself.

The main cost associated with such a farmers market will be for the hire of the Woman's Institute Hall. It was not possible to obtain information about the hire costs prior to drafting the report. The information will be reported at the meeting.

Proposed that this Sub-Committee RECOMMENDS

That Members approve the establishment of a Farmers Market for a trial period of three months, during the summer of 2000. (HCPI)

Background Papers

None