

Boyne Valley Food Strategy 2016-2021



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Foreword

The Boyne Valley region has been synonymous with food production and trade dating as far back as 10,000 years ago. More recently the commencement of the Boyne Valley Food Series in 2013 has helped cement the region as leading player on the national food stage. This has culminated in the region recently being proclaimed the top Foodie Destination in Ireland for 2016. In addition many local businesses have been recognised nationally for individual achievements.

The Irish food sector itself is growing rapidly. In 2015, Irish agri-food and drink exports increased by an estimated 3% to approximately €10.8BN (Bord Bia, 2016). The Irish agri-food and drink sector accounts for 7.6% of Irelands economy-wide GVA, (DAFM, 2014); 12.3% of Ireland's exports and 8.6% of total employment (DAFM, 2014). Foodwise 2025, the Government food strategy is underpinning these successes.

As part of the development of a wider local economic plan, Meath County Council in partnership with Louth County Council and their respective LEOs, identified the need for a Food Strategy for the region. While the strategy sits under the Boyne Valley banner, it has been written with all parts of both counties in mind, on the basis that the tourist or consumer does not necessarily recognise geographic boundaries.

This strategy has been designed to help support all existing initiatives and introduce new innovative aspects, which have been structured, as part of a road map and will help guide all stakeholders in a focussed direction. For the strategy to be successful, it will need all stakeholders (producers, foodservice operators, tourism operators and state agencies) to work in unison and share this common vision.

Our hope is that the strategy will enable the region to continue to excel within the food sphere and bring commercial success to all its stakeholders.

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Executive Summary

As a support mechanism for current food initiatives within the Boyne Valley region a strategic review of the food sector in the region was conducted.

The key challenges highlighted from this review were:

- The volunteer nature of the current structures supporting the Boyne Valley Food Series and other initiatives will run the risk of tiring and a potential slowdown in the number of events in the region.
- There is no singular vision to guide the multiple agencies involved in food which can sometimes lead to a well-intentioned, but fragmented approach.
- The large population in Dublin does not see, or isn't responding in sufficient numbers to the strong calendar of food events practically on its doorstep.
- Chef knowledge of the local food supply base, while improving, is limited in some establishments.
- The lack of a formal food network in the region has created a void in food stakeholder communication forums.

The research also identified significant opportunities:

- The attention the region is receiving through individual stakeholders winning awards and through the region winning the 'Foodie Destination' award 2016 will create significant media interest.
- The Boyne Valley region is positioned well within Ireland Ancient East to capitalise, and lead the way with its food credentials.
- The food landscape is the ideal catalyst to allow both County Councils and other agencies in both counties to work in collaboration with one single objective.
- The Boyne Valley Food Hub project will ultimately present large scale producers with new global opportunities.

As part of the strategy formation a framework was developed to support the Boyne Valley Food Strategy. This is represented other six key platforms.

1. Create a Louth/Meath Food Network.
2. Become the Food Champion of Ireland's Ancient East.
3. Develop the Micro Food Economy.
4. Target the '90 Minute Drive' Visitor.
5. Strengthen the Food Business Skillset.
6. Implement the Strategy.

The strategy authors have emphasised three critical enablers for strategy implementation:

1. The appointment of a dedicated Food Development Officer.
2. The proactive engagement between all agencies connected with the food sector from both counties.
3. The provision of financial supports in order to enable the strategy execution.

1. Introduction

The Boyne Valley, within Ireland's Ancient East, Fáilte Ireland's umbrella destination, is world renowned for its rich heritage and wonderful landscape. Part of '*the land of 5,000 dawns,*' the Boyne Valley region encompasses the majority of County Meath and County Louth, and has been recognised as one of Ireland's top food destinations in recent years, with the very best of artisan food producers, rich farm lands and award winning cafes and restaurants.

The development of a Boyne Valley Food Strategy, as a support measure to the Meath Economic Development Strategy 2014-2022 is being formulated to enhance the good work already commenced in the region. The Boyne Valley Food Strategy will encompass County Louth to foster a common infrastructure, development and marketing approach and present the Boyne Valley food landscape using its unique heritage, history, attraction and culture.

The objective for the region is to be recognised as a 'go to' destination in national and international food tourism. The food strategy is intended to assist Tourism and Trade, attracting increased business for food stakeholders, and provide economic growth and job creation. It's also focused on generating additional bed-nights and support initiatives which enhance the quality of life through support for the arts, sport and recreation and heritage potential of the region.

The Boyne Valley Food Series committee and Meath County Council have identified the need for a food strategy for the Boyne Valley region which will bring together the key stakeholders within the sector to develop a roadmap so that the region will become the national food and drink destination. This objective has also been identified in the Boyne Valley Tourism Strategy 2016-2020 -*Outcome 20.5 Food and Drink 'The Boyne Valley is recognised as the national food and craft drinks tourism destination'*.

Figure 1.1. Illustrates the location of the Boyne Valley region relevant to the Boyne Valley Food Strategy.

Figure 1.1.



2. Methodology

Meath County Council, in partnership with Louth County Council, and their Local Enterprise Offices, set out to create a strategy for the food sector. James Burke and Associates were appointed to facilitate the creation of this strategy following a tender process.

2.1. The objectives set out as part of initial brief were:

- Encourage restaurants and chefs to promote and utilise local produce through initiatives such as *'Place on a Plate.'*
- Develop a cohesive Boyne Valley Food Tourism Network.
- Provide guidance and structure to operate and grow the Boyne Valley Food Series.
- Develop a strong single network of Boyne Valley Food Producers with clear objectives.
- Examine how the development of the Boyne Valley Food Hub can contribute and impact food research, development and education in the region.

2.2. Phases

The project was broken down into distinct phases. Each phase informed the next phase.

- Phase One – Understand and assess the current situation.
- Phase Two – Undertake stakeholder group meetings to secure feedback.
- Phase Three – Conduct One to One Interviews.
- Phase Four – Undertake desk research on domestic and international best practice in the food sector.
- Phase Five- Strategy write up.

2.3. Why does a Boyne Valley Food Strategy need to be created?

County Louth and Meath have accelerated their food journey in recent years and examples of this are set out from Page 12 and 14. At national level many of these initiatives are regarded as pioneering and ground breaking on the Irish Food scene. With this increased activity the region needs a food strategy to support an ever increasing array of initiatives. The strategy will assist with the following:

- Bring greater vision and direction to the food arena within the region.
- Identify priorities.
- Ensure that all food stakeholders and food agencies have a common roadmap.
- Provide a forum for agencies connected with food and drink to work together.
- Develop and strengthen the Boyne Valley Food Series.

- Foster greater inter-county collaboration where appropriate.
- Allow for funding to be targeted in a cohesive manner.
- Make greater use of existing resources.
- Simplify decision making.
- Improve communications to all cohorts.
- Ensure commitment from all stakeholders.

3. National and Local Landscape

3.1. Foodwise 2025

Ireland's agri-food business industry continues to be vital for communities across the island to connect vast and diverse food markets around the globe. Building on what has been a largely successful decade to date, the Food Wise 2025 Strategy has set out a vision of the industry continuing along this course of growth, recognising the importance of strategic foresight if emerging opportunities are to be fully realised in the decade ahead.

Food Wise 2025, sets out a cohesive, strategic plan for the development of agri-food sector over the next decade, foreseeing a sector that acts more strategically and achieves a competitive critical mass in the international marketplace while targeting more quality conscious consumers who will recognise and reward Ireland's food producers for their sustainable production and high quality produce.

The long-term vision as set out in the report is of 'Local Roots Global Reach' based on the continued development of the sector where efficient and environmentally-friendly production delivers sustainable export growth on global markets. The Committee believes that achieving this vision will benefit primary producers, processors and the food manufacturing sector, as well as the wider economy.

The Boyne Valley Food Strategy, in its formation is mindful of Food Wise 2025 and takes direction from it. In particular these recommendations have influenced the strategy formation:

- The attraction, retention and development of talent right along the supply chain, supported by training that will foster the necessary technical and entrepreneurial skill sets.
- A greater focus on market development that is consumer-insight driven to ensure Irish products are targeted at the right markets and the right segments within those markets.
- Productivity improvements that are driven by innovation and the adoption of the latest technologies.
- Value addition to sustainably-produced primary materials, which will support local employment growth, ensure the viability of local producers and protect the environment and natural resources.

www.agriculture.gov.ie

3.2. Fáilte Ireland

Fáilte Ireland recognises the importance of food in tourism and have been working with the Boyne Valley Food Series team bringing the latest best practices to the series. As part of Fáilte Ireland's food tourism strategy see key points in Appendix 2.3. The Boyne Valley Food Series was enabled through the development and support of a food champion for the region. Following the success of the Wild Atlantic Way, Fáilte Ireland are focusing on Ireland's Ancient East which has obvious synergies with the Boyne Valley region and its historic past. Of particular interest is the focus of Irelands Ancient East and the story telling element of its focus which suits the Boyne Valley food landscape particularly well.

Figure 3.2.1. illustrates the boundaries of Ireland's Ancient East.

Figure 3.2.1.



3.3. Bord Bia

Bord Bia, the Irish Food Board, acts as a link between Irish food, drink and horticulture suppliers and existing and potential customers throughout the world.

The food board provides substantial supports for food producers which are considering entering the market and over the past number of years have introduced new initiatives which have helped facilitate potential food business startups. Examples of these include 'Bord Bia Vantage,' which is an online resource centre for small food businesses. Catering for the small to medium food business, Bord Bia Vantage helps them grow and develop their business at home and abroad.

Through the Food Academy Programme, for which Bord Bia create the content, and which is lead and financed by the Local Enterprise Offices, several local Louth/Meath producers are now on the shelves in local Supervalu shops in both counties.

3.4. Local Food Landscape

3.4.1. Boyne Valley Food Series

2013 saw the inaugural 'Meath Food Series' with a summer long calendar of food events from Food Safaris to Foraging Days, Restaurant Trails to Gourmet Cycles. The series which took place throughout the summer attracted an array of national & regional press, blogs and local media and won the Award for 'Innovation in Marketing' at the Meath Business and Tourism Awards.

The series resulted in a total of 51 food and drink related businesses in the county working together in a cooperative marketing campaign to host 34 unique food events over the course of the summer months from June to September.

As Meath and Louth continued to be a growing tourism destination under the umbrella of the Boyne Valley Brand, the 'Boyne Valley Food Series' was established in 2014. This included Louth bringing some new visitor attractions and producers. In terms of support it would also mean that the campaign would move in line with marketing priorities of Boyne Valley Tourism, Fáilte Ireland, Meath and Louth Tourism and the established Boyne Valley driving route.

The Boyne Valley Food Series, now in its third year in 2016, is supported by Fáilte Ireland and Meath County Council, and continues to bring together businesses working to create a food tourism offering based on visitor experience and quirky, authentic events rooted in the unique history and landscape of the area, while showcasing the best of the regions producers, chefs, farmers, venues and of course, people.

Recent events which took place as part of the Boyne Valley Food Series included the Blossom Walk, Focus on Fish Festival, Electric Bike Tour, Bird Watch Meath and Newgrange Gold Dawn

Chorus, Louth Food Safari with Monasterboice Inn, and Irish Food Festival with Sheridan's Cheesemongers.

3.4.2. 'Foodie Destination' Winner 2016

The Boyne Valley region came out on top ahead of nine others across the country to become the winner of the best "Foodie Destination" in Ireland in 2016, having been shortlisted the previous year.

The Foodie Destinations initiative was originally part of the Irish Restaurant Awards but has proved to be so popular it became its own entity. The Boyne Valley region competed with several others including The Burren, which won the award in 2015.

The award is given to a destination where there are a cluster of high-quality places to eat, supporting local food. These include not just restaurants, but food festivals and farmers' markets. It aims to highlight local food tourism initiatives across the country.

3.4.3. 'Place on a Plate'

The initiative '*Place on a Plate*', created in 2016, was created to encourage businesses to adopt an ethos of offering fresh, locally sourced, seasonal food on their menu and just as importantly, make sure they are telling their customers about it. Research has shown that in recent years experiencing local foods and beverages, which express the identity of a destination through food culture and heritage, has become a sought after travel experience for both domestic and international visitors.

For the Boyne Valley region, the initiative has been managed by the Boyne Valley Food Series to ensure all members showcase at least one dish on their menus which is sourced from Boyne Valley Artisan Producers. This will be recognised by an emblem on menus with the organisers confident that it will grow in time to highlight the best authentic tastes from the Boyne Valley.

The Boyne Valley Food Series serves to encourage a new wave of culinary tourist, whether opportunistic or deliberate, to experience the very best of 'place on a plate', the personalities behind that plate and the story behind the production.

3.4.4. Boyne Valley Food Hub- 'The Silicon Valley of Food'

The 'Boyne Valley Food Hub,' a new purpose built site being developed in the Boyne Valley region, is being billed as a hub that will be for food "What Silicon Valley is to technology".

Driven by Meath Enterprise, with support from Meath County Council and several stakeholders, the initiative aims to accelerate food innovation and research. It will do so

through collaborative partnerships to create scalable and sustainable food agribusinesses with growth and export potential.

The Boyne Valley Food Hub will seek to accelerate business innovation and research in the region by fostering the establishment of collaborative partnerships between;

- Local and national government agencies,
- Academic / research institutions,
- Food companies, large and small, that have ambitions for growth in the ever expanding global food markets.

Vision - 'To facilitate a scalable expansion of new and existing food companies to exploit the global opportunity in the food sector by providing guidance, support, resources and facilities which will enable economic and social benefits for Ireland at local and national level'

The Boyne Valley Food Hub is an innovation centre focused on meeting the short and medium term, real-world problems faced by food start-ups and SME companies trying to grow through the provision of existing/new products and services to existing/new markets.

The principle aim of the Boyne Valley Food Hub is to enable food companies to scale by;

- Exploiting the global opportunity in the food sector.
- Developing best-in-class innovation practices for use and adoption by client companies.
- Connecting the tech sector with the food sector to enable the successful early adoption of new capabilities.

3.4.5. Other Food Initiatives

Outside of the Boyne Valley Food series framework there are several other strong food activities:

- Taste of Louth.
- Carlingford Craft and Food Fair.
- Irish Maritime Festival.
- Louth Agricultural Show.

4. Boyne Valley Food SWOT Analysis

Desk Research and Stakeholder Group Meetings conducted indicated that the Boyne Valley region had a number of key competitive Strengths/Opportunities and Weaknesses/Threats. These are summarised in Figure 4.1 and expanded individually in Figure 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5.

Figure 4.1

SWOT ANALYSIS

 STRENGTHS	 WEAKNESSES	 OPPORTUNITIES	 THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse range of local products • Strengthened food activity in recent years • Developed food skill base • Organically developed food producer groups • Reputation as a meat producing region • Strong food production capacity • History of Local Government agencies very supportive of food projects • Food Heritage and fertile soil. History of Food & Agriculture • Accessibility to Dublin consumer market • Strong Tourism Product-Boyne Valley • Innovative local Government food sourcing e.g. Meath County Council staff restaurant local food menus • Ground breaking emerging initiatives-Boyne Valley Food Hub • Support for creating a Louth/Meath Food Network • Passionate and committed food leadership team • Emergence of new food and beverage categories in the region e.g. distilleries etc • Lush green landscape synonymous with quality food production • M1 and M3 ensure great accessibility to the region • Pioneering and vibrant Boyne Valley Food Series • The Boyne Valley Food Series brand • 'Foodie Destination' Winner 2016 • Award winning products • Strong on family businesses e.g. mushrooms • Strong awareness of the Boyne Valley name/region internationally • Retail route to market supports e.g. Food Academy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overworked voluntary leadership team • Limited volunteer pool. Small core group • Inadequate producer marketing. Some producers sell themselves short. • Limited marketing of the Boyne Valley food story outside the region • Poor Dublin population engagement with the regions food scene • Communication streams between producers and chefs fragmented • Chef knowledge of local food supply base limited. No producer showcase event in place • Limited inter county food collaboration projects • Limited funding for food marketing or promotional campaigns • Lack of local food on menus in some tourist venues • Limited funding for food initiatives • No umbrella Louth/Meath food network • Limited coverage for 'Place on a Plate' at this point • Under developed farmers market network with lack of strategy • There are only limited examples of producers selling directly to consumers • Slow, but improving, emergence of new food producer start-ups in Louth and Meath • Not recognised well enough as an established food region i.e. when compared to West Cork etc • Lack of knowledge on business management tools for many • Inconsistency from Artisan Producers with regard to product supply (chefs being left short) • Not taking advantage of tourists visits looking for overall experience i.e. majority of tourists visit one venue and leave • Business Training for upskill and collaboration work • More events needed on a regular basis for Ireland's Ancient East which tell the food story • Not enough emphasis placed on building relationships between all stakeholders in the food sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment and development of a community led 'Micro Food Economy' • Attracting Dublin based & other domestic visitors to the region • Attracting international tourists to the region • Increased amounts of local produce on restaurant menus • Telling the story of the Producer with increased frequency • Increase heritage site inclusion of local food on menu • Employment growth through encouraging more food start ups • Employment growth through the development of the Boyne Valley Food Hub • Training and upskilling programmes for all food stakeholder sectors • Training & Innovation workshops for food producers • Ireland's Ancient East Marketing & opportunities for increased footfall • Creating more producer to consumer direct selling models • Developing stronger relationships with the Institutes of Education and agencies to provide specialised training programmes • Putting stakeholders under same marketing umbrella-Local, Micro, Export • Meath is famous for beef and lamb-large production. More required onto menus. • Louth has an array of local food producers which specialise in pork and bacon. More required onto menus. • Heritage/Biodiversity Plan-opportunity to work together • Focus more on food culture and celtic food heritage and the experience it brings • Expand Big Brother Little Brother mentor model where large companies mentor small • Bring about changes in local sourcing policies of all Government offices • Promote the ease of travel/accessibility of the region to domestic tourists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brexit and possible effects on tourist numbers • Failure to secure sufficient funding to support strategy initiatives • Failure to achieve cross agency strategy support and commitment. • Strengthening of Dublin-breath of fresh air strategy • Insufficient food development management & implementation • Failure to provide resource commitment for economic growth and job creation • Potential disappearance of leadership volunteers if not supported

Figure 4.2

SWOT ANALYSIS



Figure 4.3

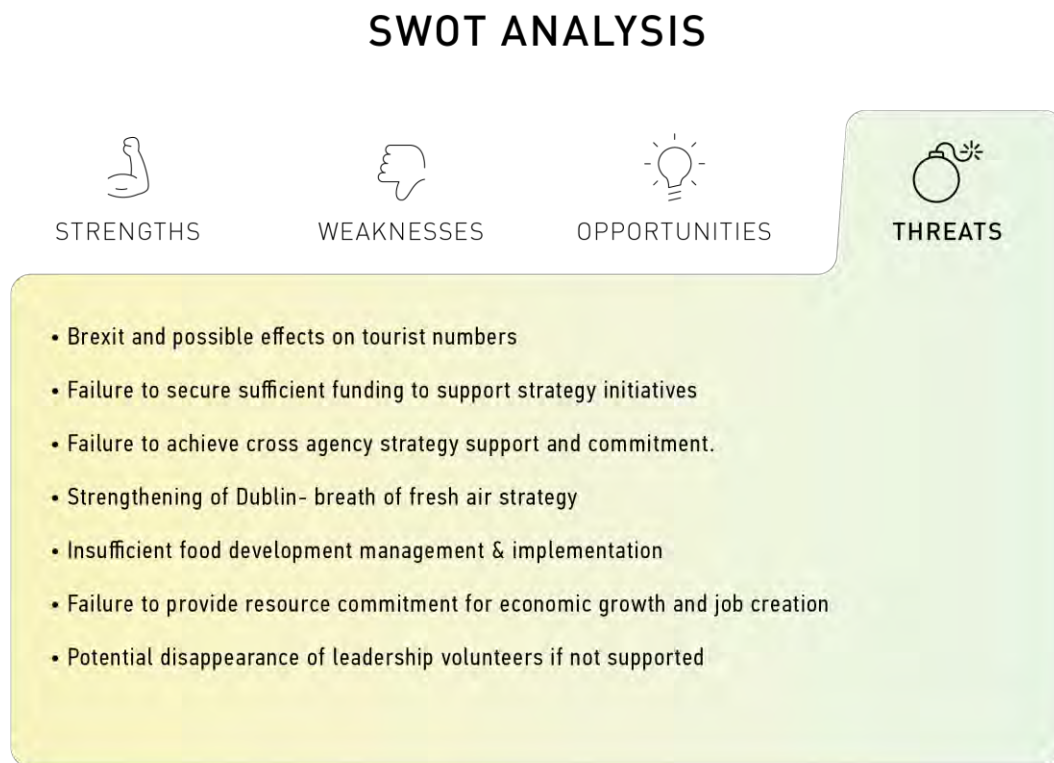


Figure 4.4

SWOT ANALYSIS



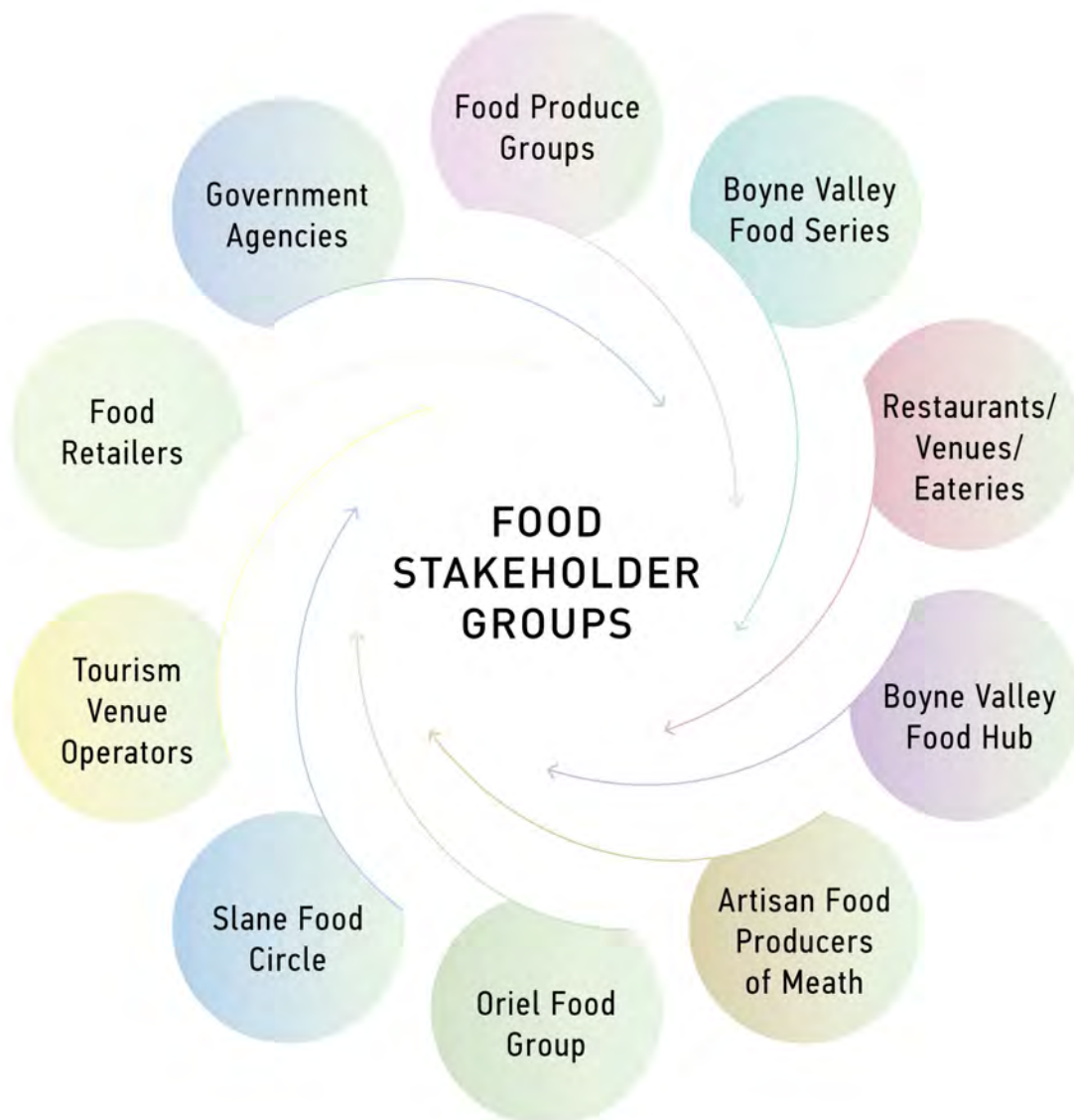
Figure 4.5



5. Stakeholder Feedback

Figure 5.1. The following chart represents key stakeholders who inputted in the strategy formation:

Figure 5.1.



5.2. Key suggested strategy content identified by stakeholders

Below are direct quotes from those who inputted in the process, on the topic of key priorities for the food strategy:

- *Must be of benefit of small rural business owners.*
- *Must be linked with education within the region.*
- *Build on Foodie Destination Award.*
- *Develop a micro food economy.*
- *Establish 'telling the story' of the producer.*
- *Restaurants do not have enough connection with producers-this needs to be addressed.*
- *Micro Producers need more substantial support.*
- *Address the distribution challenge with food service-buying local from producers.*
- *A gradual rollout of the strategy should be developed.*
- *Invest in local food and culture.*
- *Brand the food region effectively.*
- *Create a forum to talk to chefs-show what produce is out there (Taste of Kerry etc).*
- *Invest in an innovation hub.*
- *Develop strong links with tourism and food-establish local produce at tourist sites.*
- *Target the '90 Minute drive' tourist.*
- *'Boyne Valley' -should be appearing on food destination map nationwide.*
- *Quality of food produce and passion should be endorsed-nurture, massive marketing tool.*
- *Establish the food culture (California Wine Valley etc.).*
- *Create a network encompassing both Louth and Meath.*
- *Maintain the 'Boyne Valley' title as key marketing term.*
- *Dublin drive-Boyne Valley must be first region thought of for food tourists.*
- *Endorse 'Place on a plate' as a key feature with a producer showcasing element.*
- *Develop an App or website for distribution model-engagement with current distributors required.*
- *Identify funding resources.*
- *Develop education/training of skill base.*
- *Utilising Northeast Food Hub at Ardee Business Park and An Grianan*
- *Introduce workshops-strategy, upskilling and innovation.*
- *Appoint a Facilitator for implementation.*
- *Market Dublin Airport and surrounding location to attract visitors.*
- *Develop the Boyne Valley app with map of services/restaurants.*
- *Engage with Ireland's Ancient East branding and events and become a leader for the region.*
- *Training of Foodservice staff.*
- *Establish the vision for all stakeholders.*
- *Consumer Education needs work-target the supermarkets.*

- *Facilitate the micro growers, butchers, family farms and fishermen.*

5.3. The key challenges identified from the SWOT Analysis and stakeholder feedback are:

- The collaboration between the two counties on food is still in its infancy.
- There is limited communication between the food producer communities with most operating in silo businesses.
- The instances of food stakeholders working together as a collective, rather than competitors is at an early stage.
- The distribution model connecting local food producers and Foodservice operators is fragmented which can portray the national food distributors as an “easier to use” solution.
- Multi agency involvement in the food sector has led to a fragmented approach.
- There is a limited number of new food producers/growers emerging within the region
- The rationale for stocking local food on menus is only at an early stage of being embraced by the food service sector.
- Training and development of new food start-up businesses presents as an opportunity to strengthen current supports and improve communication for further growth and development.
- There is a lack of visibility of local produce at some heritage and tourist sites.
- The over reliance on volunteers to drive the majority of food and drink events is leading to potential “burn out” and a reversal of the pace and scope of future initiatives.
- Marketing of the Louth/Meath food story to a wider domestic and tourist audience to be enhanced and developed.

6. Desk Research

Desk Research was conducted to ascertain domestic and international frameworks which exhibit good food practice and approaches whilst creating an established and collaborative food network, and a fully functional local food economy. The majority of these learnings have been incorporated into the strategic platforms in the following pages. Some of the key learnings from the research are:

1. Many food regions have developed a road map with defined objectives which will lead to the success of the local food strategy.
2. Local Food Marketing and sourcing guides are becoming a vital component for the accessibility of local produce.
3. The Food Assembly, which is an online consumer shop, is recognised as a key feature for many food regions in order for consumers to purchase local fresh food directly from the farmer or producer.
4. Many food regions globally have introduced local crowdfunding schemes in order to develop micro food business growth.
5. Food charters have become increasingly popular for local food strategies in order to enhance the biodiversity of the region-restaurants creating locally sourced produce on their menus.
6. Food Hubs build strong local food networks in a significant way, as a source of innovation and entrepreneurship.
7. Local Food Tourism is essential for the economic growth of a region. Tourist and Heritage sites are becoming common ground for marketing the local food producer through the endorsement of their produce.
8. Local businesses work better as a collective, creating numerous communication streams and networking which in turn promotes the 'Micro Food Economy.'
9. Many food regions have established a new business to business distribution model to ensure local food is available to order from Foodservice operators-this in turn bridges the producer to chef gap.
10. Local food businesses can greatly enhance their customer growth with the aid of digital media and PR platforms.

7. Strategy Vision and Objectives

7.1. Strategy Vision:

'For the Boyne Valley region to be recognised as the leading national food and drinks destination. To be the stand out food region within Ireland's Ancient East.'

7.2. Objectives:

- To develop and deepen Boyne Valley's food identity and reputation.
- To provide a resource to facilitate collaboration among food stakeholders working locally.
- To help improve visitor experiences through local food and drink.
- To increase visitor spend and new tourism opportunities.
- To support Boyne Valley's Micro food economy and business diversity.
- To increase local employment in the food sector and training opportunities.
- To improve community opportunities to access local food.
- To link local food with other cultural, environmental and educational activities.

7.3. Outcomes

The outcomes for the Boyne Valley Food Strategy are wide ranging and are based on short, medium and long term objectives for the region. These include:

1. Enhance collaboration between County Louth and Meath and other state agencies with regard to food policy and activity.
2. Develop relationships, and a co-operative approach between food producers and foodservice operators/food retailers.
3. Establish the region as the leading Micro Food Economy in Ireland.
4. The region to be viewed by the domestic and international tourist as the number one "go to" food territory within Ireland.
5. The region to be viewed as the best place to start and run a successful food business in Ireland.
6. Extension of events held under the Boyne Valley Food Series to run throughout the year.
7. Create a stronger food tourism sector with expanded/enhanced visitor opportunities.
8. Introduce a new local produce distribution model initiated to facilitate easier trade buyer/seller transactions.
9. Enhance training and mentoring support for new and existing food businesses.
10. Improve communication streams for food business stakeholders.
11. To establish Boyne Valley as the Food Champion at the forefront of Ireland's Ancient East campaign.
12. Enhance food sustainability and biodiversity connection in the region with increased promotion of the *'Place on a plate'* initiative.

13. To put a Food Development structure and process in place which is regarded by others as a best practice model.
14. Increase employment within the food and drink sector in both counties.
15. Increase commercial success for food stakeholders.
16. To ensure residents in both counties understand the importance of local food and the role they can play in ensuring the micro food economy works.

8. Key Strategic Platforms

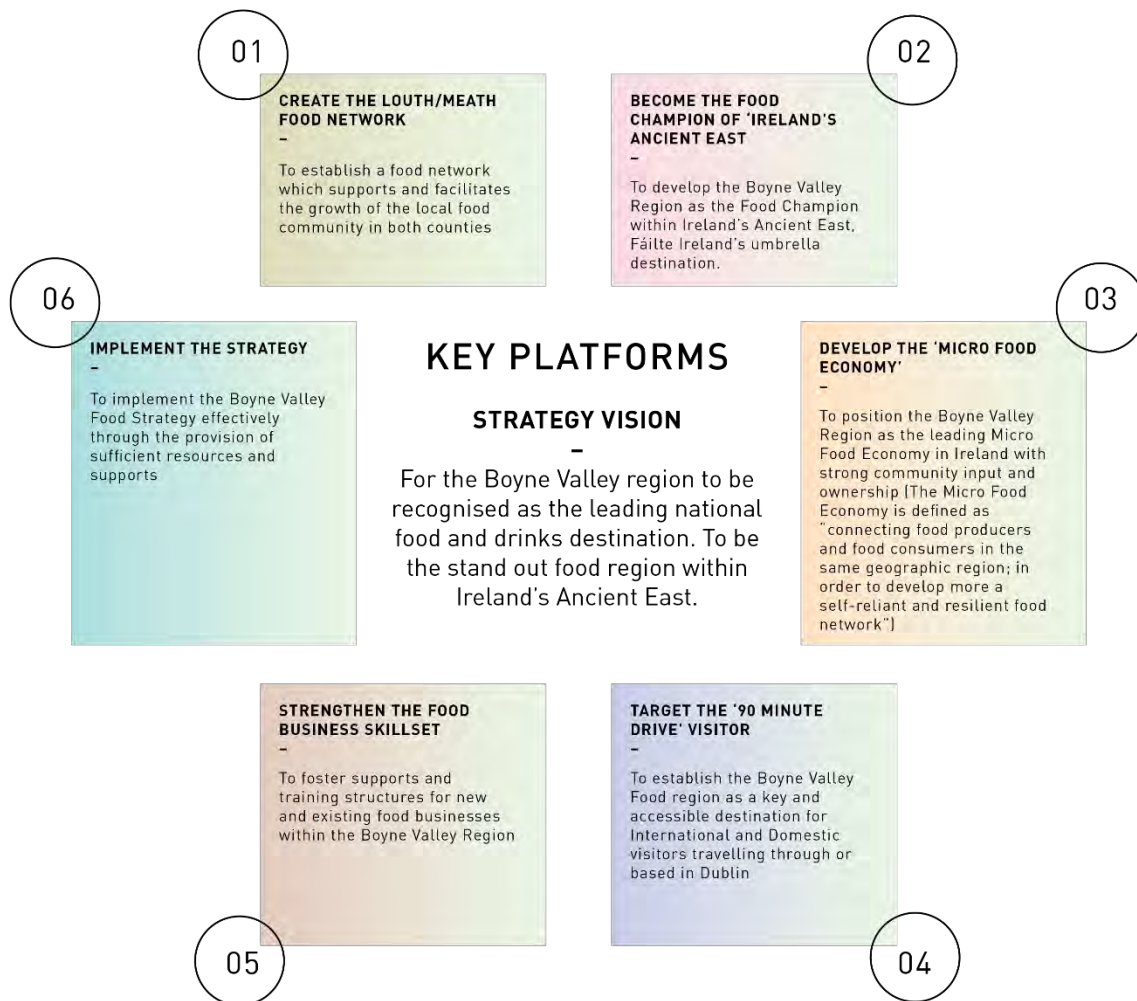
8.1. Platforms

A framework has been developed to support the Boyne Valley Food Strategy under 6 platforms, under which the recommendations and actions sit. These headings are:

1. Create a Louth/Meath Food Network.
2. Become the Food Champion of Ireland's Ancient East.
3. Develop the Micro Food Economy.
4. Target the '90 Minute Drive' Visitor.
5. Strengthen the Food Business Skillset.
6. Implement the Strategy.

See Figure 8.2. representing the 6 key platforms and vision (the actions for each platform are listed in section 9)

Figure 8.2.



9. Boyne Valley Food Platforms

9.1. Create a Louth/Meath Food Network

VISION: To establish a food network which supports and facilitates the growth of the local food community in both counties.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Create an **umbrella business to business food network** which facilitates collaboration of those within it i.e. local food producers and Foodservice operators, food retailers, tourism operators and other key stakeholders.
2. Ensure the network **spans both counties** and appeals to all food cohorts (existing food networks).
3. **Showcase local food products** and foster member to member commercial opportunities.
4. Develop **communication** streams.
5. Bridge the gap between the producer to chef/retailer.
6. Ensure that the network **acts a food business information point** which sign posts appropriate supports, help and activities within the region.
7. **Provide educative platforms** for all stakeholders, strengthening the business skillset.
8. Facilitate **talks/seminars** for those within the Louth/Meath Food Network.
9. Provide a forum which facilitates **networking** within the food community and encourages **relationship building**.

ACTIONS:

1. Form a small 'Food Network Development Committee' to identify and co-ordinate events.
2. Put in place a third party contractor to run the network.
3. Identify a partner agency who will fund the network activities.
4. Ensure active recruitment in both counties.
5. Develop a Food Network website. Suggested content:
 - a. Resource links to all agencies connected with the food sector e.g. LEO, Bord Bia etc.
 - b. Signpost information for supports for those starting a food business.
 - c. A membership registration page (recommend no fee and pay per event attended model).
 - d. News and events detailing relevant training supports from all food agencies etc.
6. Develop appropriate digital media platforms for the network.

7. Promote all food supports, training etc. from all Government agencies to network members.
8. Explore setting up a local food awards scheme to recognise excellence in the sector.
 - Awards which might be considered for food producers:
 - Supporting the foodservice operator.
 - Distribution service.
 - Branding and packaging.
 - Best launch of product.
 - Best digital media activity.
 - Awards which might be considered for foodservice operators:
 - Locally sourced menus.
 - Marketing and promotion of local produce.
 - Hosting of food themed events with the objective of promoting local food
9. Target 5 events for the first year:
 - a. An annual producer showcase/meet the buyer event.
 - b. 2 smaller breakfast morning events with a target attendance of 40 members.
 - Sample topics:
 - i. Securing funding to grow a food business. Example guest input from TV Dragon, Crowd Funder, Local Enterprise Office etc.
 - ii. Succeeding with specialty retailers. Example guest inputs... from Avoca, Donnybrook Fair, Local Specialty Retailer.
 - c. 2 larger evening events:
 - i. Building your food brand online with guest input Example guest inputs from Google, Facebook, Cully and Sully brand case study etc.
 - ii. Making Local Food work. Example guest inputs...from Richard Corrigan, The Winding Stair (food provenance) etc.
10. Ensure some producer product tastings take place at each event to stimulate commercial activity.
11. Organise at least 2 familiarisation trips per year e.g.
 - a. Latest Food Trends, London visit.
 - b. Food Tourism in action, to an award winning overseas food destination.
 - c. Visit to an overseas trade show/conference.
12. Conduct one training needs analysis of all members annually and liaise with relevant agencies to develop appropriate programmes and supports to be delivered either through local agencies or the network.
13. Consider creating a hard copy producer directory which could be circulated to local and national buyers.

9.2. Become the Food Champion of Ireland's Ancient East

VISION: To develop the Boyne Valley Region as the Food Champion within Ireland's Ancient East, Fáilte Ireland's umbrella destination.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Position the region as a **key food destination** on the food tourist road map.
2. Highlight the **extensive history behind the food landscape** and the key areas of interest.
3. Present the historical background and **story-telling of producers**, and the making of their product.
4. Ensure Boyne Valley food is at the **forefront of messaging** within Ireland's Ancient East.
5. Explore a **partnership with a leading tourist venue** to establish a local food space on site.
6. **Increase awareness** amongst the domestic and international tourist visitor of the food region's offerings.
7. **Increase the level of overseas visitors** through Ireland's Ancient East concept as part of the long term vision for the food region.
8. To position Boyne valley region as **the best online/digital communicator** within Ireland's Ancient East.

ACTIONS:

1. Create a food producer online directory, which contains their story, their location, reviews and other helpful resources. The Boyne Valley steering group will engage with restaurants to ensure they access the online directory to present the story of the food producer on an ongoing basis.
2. Run a training programme to increase awareness for all food stakeholders of how to engage with Ireland's Ancient East and provide assistance in the form of mentoring to food businesses in linking food stories to the initiative.
3. Develop a tool kit of marketing and communication suggestions for use by food stakeholders- e.g. through print or online material.
4. Create a large digital project with the intention of upskilling every single food business within the food region ensuring they automatically appear in tourist searches for food.
5. Establish an implementation team who will support individual businesses in setting up digital presence, collaborating with third level digital students. There would be two elements in relation to this:
 - a. A masterclass session led by market leaders such as Google, or LinkedIn on how to maximize Search Engine Optimisation (SEO).
 - b. Provide food stakeholders with access to a SEO expert who will implement changes to their website as required.

6. Organise food events to tie in with Ireland's Ancient East scheduled events which take place in the region during the year.
7. Establish a food marketing strategy through social media in collaboration with Ireland's Ancient East promotional campaigns.
8. Work with accommodation operators to encourage them to partner with heritage events in the region to host 'Cultural Food packages' which in turn would increase overnight stays.
9. Explore partnership with the Newgrange site to develop a modern food tourism experience encompassing local food.
10. Boyne Valley region to host a major national food event each year celebrating 'Celtic cooking and food history'. This will be hosted in partnership from Fáilte Ireland and its objective will be to be the national showcase of what Irelands Ancient East has to offer in food.
11. Develop a robust PR plan for the regions Ancient East food story.
12. Host domestic and international tourism journalist visits to the region in partnership with Fáilte Ireland- target 10 journalist visits in year 1. Develop a press pack of information on the Boyne Valleys, Ancient East food story, and provide high resolution images for this group.
13. Create a press release to be issued to all Irish journalists and travel/leisure writers showcasing the regions Ancient East food story.
14. Provide individual food stakeholders with content and images to allow these individuals to create their own Ancient East press releases.
15. Take a stand at an International Tourism show with the objective of showcasing the Boyne Valley food region to International tour operators.
16. Host a visit from 5 suitable international tour operators on a fact finding visit to the region. The objective is to get them to choose the Boyne Valley region for one of their Ireland tour routes and/or spend more time in the region and visit more sites if already coming.
17. Take 10 food operators from the Louth and Meath region to visit a global food tourism 'best in class' region in order to upskill them. This tour would be modelled on the Fáilte Ireland Food Champions visits, on a mini scale.
18. Develop a library of high resolution photographic images of food from the region to be made available to Ireland's Ancient East team for use in their marketing material and for all the food stakeholders in the region.
19. Establish an award scheme for local businesses which incorporate their food story with Ireland's Ancient East messaging.
20. Introduce recipe cards for visitors to camping sites in the region highlighting local produce.
21. Ensure all B&Bs and hotel operators have a food map they can give tourists to encourage them to stay in the region. Provide these operators with a training session at the start of the tourist season.
22. Develop a Boyne Valley/Ancient East food app to guide the tourists around the regions food highlights.

23. Create a project to look at the feasibility of introducing and supporting better visitor facilities at key food producer venues so as to expand/enhance the tour options available.

9.3. Develop the Micro Food Economy

VISION: To position the Boyne Valley Region as the leading Micro Food Economy in Ireland with strong community input and ownership (The Micro Food Economy is defined as “connecting food producers and food consumers in the same geographic region; in order to develop more a self-reliant and resilient food network”).

OBJECTIVES:

1. Create new communication and network streams for local food micro businesses
2. **Improve distribution solutions** for micro food producers.
3. Identify areas for investment and funding for of the region.
4. **Integrate schools and colleges** into the Micro Food Economy through education programmes.
5. **Enhance the food sustainability** and biodiversity connection for the region.
6. Create more food jobs within the micro food sector and **encourage more new start-ups**.
7. Strengthen **supports for pre start up** and start up producers.
8. Encourage more **food entrepreneurship** within the region.
9. Establish a new **direct selling online route** market for producers to consumers.
10. Foster an **environment** for micro food businesses to survive and thrive.

ACTIONS:

1. Boyne Valley steering group to organize quarterly engagement meetings between agencies in the region.
2. Facilitate local Chefs to identify gaps (either import substitution or new trends products) in the market for new and existing products. Catalogue this information and communicate it to the producer community together with supports to action projects e.g. mentors to assist with the delivery of “gap filling” projects.
3. Further support the TASTE Council Transition Year programme and target participation of 80% of all TY classes in the region.
4. Conduct a feasibility study for developing a local Boyne Valley food reward card for supermarket chains/local food stores to encourage shoppers to purchase local produce.
5. Explore improving signposting of ‘local’ food by: setting up a local food section or labelling on shelves and packaging within food retailers.
6. Support the creation of cook books that specialise in local recipes, for example Dermot Seabury’s ‘Ireland, a Culinary Journey in the North-East’.

7. Pilot a 'Local to Boyne Valley' diet/food programme for a month, sourcing all your produce from a 60KM radius. The programme would run in conjunction with the airing of RTE's Operation Transformation.
8. Develop a marketing campaign which emphasises the quality, taste and freshness of local food.
9. Create local media partnerships to ensure that media commentators fully understand the food strategy.
10. Conduct a feasibility study re the introduction of a new distribution model for Business to Business accessibility and sourcing of local produce. The aim is to make it ways for chefs/food managers to order local food. Explore the following:
 - a. Coop distribution models.
 - b. The use of electric vehicles.
 - c. Combined electronic invoicing systems covering multiple producers.
 - d. The use of technology to pinpoint shared journey routes.
 - e. The use of technology to facilitate order collection.
11. A 'Boyne Valley Food Assembly' to be introduced (The Food Assembly is a European Online Direct Farmer to Consumer model which can be customized for local use. The consumer orders directly online from farmers and producers and product is delivered to a central location for collection).
12. A new 'Grown/made in Boyne Valley' logo/symbol to be created and introduced for all local produce. Point of sale material to be created for food retailers to use.
13. An Online notice board to be introduced which will provide information on in season produce availability, distribution and delivery processes.
14. Strengthen the current "Place on a Plate" initiative.
15. Review the current "Place on a Plate" name in favour of a more consumer friendly name. Design support marketing material:
 - Logo.
 - Leaflets.
 - Wall Plaques.
 - Separate page on Food Series Website.
- 15 Increased engagement and expanding the scheme to target 50 participating restaurants to introduce regional dishes based on locally produced foods to protect the Biodiversity of the region.
- 16 Run a masterclass for chefs and restaurant/ hotel owners re the merits of local sourcing from a high profile chef who already embraces the topic e.g. Richard Corrigan.
- 17 Create a programme of workshops to upskill chefs on best use of seasonal/local foods. Place particular emphasis on presenting the commercial model around this (many chefs/owners mistakenly believe this is a less profitable route for them).
- 18 Organise a calendar of field trips for chefs and food retailers to local farms and producers to develop and expand their knowledge of local produce available to them
- 19 Local Farms to stage specialist food events open to the public e.g. open farm days. The aim of these is to bridge the urban/rural divide and showcase local produce to the public. Explore tying this in with in with RTE Farm Week programme of activity.

- 20 Support for traditional artisan butchers, who buy the majority of their meat from the local region, and ensure that all their meat is Irish, should form part of an approach to strengthen local the local artisan retail sector. Supports might include the following:
- The development of criteria which defines an artisan butcher-relating to the source of their animals and the practice of traditional butchering skills such as breaking carcasses, sausage / pudding production, bacon curing, aging of beef etc.
 - A marketing scheme which recognises their support of local agriculture and food.
 - Retail Training and mentoring supports for these butchers with particular emphasis on reviving “lost and forgotten” skills.
 - The creation of a sub set of the “Place on a Plate” scheme specifically for artisan butchers.
 - Consideration of special grants for improvements to shops fronts and other key improvements which enhance the “traditional” nature of these businesses e.g. installation of equipment which facilitates the production of products which use traditional skills, or where skills/products are in danger of being lost.
- 21 Establish workshops and discussion groups in schools/colleges to increase the level of education about local businesses and enterprises (tie in with the TASTE council transition year programme).
- 22 Conduct a study to identify regionally produced products which could apply for European Regional Protection under the PDO and PGI schemes. Support this application through knowledge provision, funds and expertise.
- 23 Create a calendar of farm and food producer visits for local third level student’s attendance (specifically targeting those in Agribusiness and Business Management). The visits would provide the students with an insight into the workings of the food industry.
- 24 Action plan for job creation to be implemented effectively through the long term development of the Food Hub.
- 25 A local crowdfunding programme to be explored to provide further supports to food businesses at start their business.
- 26 Local Enterprise Offices to explore new ways to expand supports for micro food businesses.
- 27 A series of “start your own food business” and “town hall” talks to be arranged throughout both counties. The objective of these talks is to stimulate interest in the topic and showcase previous success stories and especially where gaps might exist.
- 28 Explore establishing a food store/co-op/mobile shop or farm shop for local groceries in a rural area not serviced by a retail outlet.
- 29 Commence campaign with local supermarkets to increase product ranges from the Boyne Valley region. Provide point of sale material to support. This campaign would run in parallel to “Place on a plate.”
- 30 Promote and encourage the use of allotments and “grow your own schemes.”

- 31 Create one week each year which is “local food week” where promotion of the local micro food economy peaks.
- 32 Improve the procurement and provision of local food in the public sector. Achieve this by using the Meath County Council staff restaurant local food project as a case study to demonstrate success to others. Target other Council facilities, hospitals etc. in both counties.
- 33 Increase access to local food through the development of a strategy to support and grow farmers/food markets within both counties. Include a review of current supports, training for stall holders and market managers and a review of suitable locations.

9.4. Target the ‘90 Minute Drive’ Visitor

VISION: To establish the Boyne Valley Food region as a key and accessible destination for International and Domestic visitors travelling through or based in Dublin.

OBJECTIVES:

1. **Market** the Boyne Valley food story to the Dublin resident and visiting tourist.
2. Promote the ‘Capital of Heritage’ and **tell the story** of Boyne Valley food.
3. **Increase visibility** of local food production at tourist locations.
4. Present the food region through **online and social media** through effective means.
5. Establish and **promote** the Boyne Valley Food Series in Dublin.
6. Create a **road map** for the Boyne Valley Food Region through digital media.
7. Boost awareness of the **close proximity** of the Boyne Valley region to the capital.
8. Focus on **“a day out”** theme as a central message.
9. Incorporate food tours and trails with tourist/heritage sites and market the local brand.

ACTIONS:

1. A new marketing campaign to be created to target Dublin-consisting of digital marketing, traditional marketing, and word of mouth.
 - a. Door drop leaflets in selected Dublin areas.
 - b. Geo target the Dublin region with paid boosts of the Boyne Valley Food Series Facebook.
 - c. Position manned “Boyne Valley info boards/kiosks” in key Dublin shopping centres with key messaging focusing on the short drive time to so many great venues and a rich food region.
 - d. Consider producing a newspaper magazine supplement for inclusion in all papers sold in Dublin similar to the West Fork model.

- e. Target specific day tour operators who transport Dublin tourists and residents out of the capital, with a marketing pack to promote the region. Pay particular emphasis on the seniors' day trip market.
2. Strengthen and expand the food tour packages available.
3. Make grant assistance available for the standard of producer/food venue visitor centres.
4. Ensure local produce is featured at tourist/heritage destinations (extend 'Place on a plate' to these sites, including OPW operated sites).
5. Open Farm days to be introduced for Second and Third Level students with particular focus on food Production and Manufacturing. These to be targeted at Dublin schools and colleges.
6. Food Stakeholders to work with external online search optimisation providers in order to promote the '90 Minute Drive' concept.
7. Introduce 5 'Meet the Farmer' events specific to overseas tourists' attendance each year.
8. Local Food Directory to be strengthened to contain local producers and farms from the Boyne Valley Food Series, within the food and drink section, on the Boyne Valley app.
9. Interactive Road map to be introduced online for the Boyne Valley Food Region similar to that of the Wild Atlantic Way.
10. Boyne Valley Food Series to introduce Dublin based events for Louth and Meath Producers i.e. set up a Boyne Valley farmers/food market at a large Dublin shopping centre which would act a showcase for the region.

9.5. Strengthen the Food Business Skillset

VISION: To foster supports and training structures for new and existing food businesses within the Boyne Valley Region.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Build a strong producer base and identify the development process with respect to **training and education**.
2. Provide a **strengthened upskilling programme and mentoring support** for new start-ups and existing businesses within the region.
3. Provide **Food Business Owners** with new skills to run a successful small or large scale business (Build strong food entrepreneurs).
4. Provide **Food Service Operators** Management and Staff with the knowledge and expertise as to why local food sourcing is critical.
5. **Create an education environment** which fosters more new start-ups, develop micro businesses to larger and ultimately for some businesses proceed to export markets, where the individual business wants to grow.

6. For businesses who chose to stay small and micro level, to provide **bespoke supports** to help this cohort.

ACTIONS:

1. Develop a training programme for chefs focussed on local produce, its seasonality, and the Micro Food Economy.
2. Run food Innovation and global food trend seminars via the food network for business owners annually (both Micro and Macro Businesses).
3. Introduce training courses providing education on local food initiatives, food heritage, and the historical food landscape of the region. The aim is to ensure that all consumer facing staff fully understand what is in their region and can successfully communicate this to the public.
4. Strengthen mentor and training supports for micro food businesses by conducting a training needs analysis to identify where the need is greatest.
5. Increase the number of “Kick Start Your Food Business Programmes” run annually which will encourage and support new start-ups.
6. Increase the marketing and awareness of the Food Academy programme. Target 2 programmes per year between both counties, with 80% proceed to trail.
7. Conduct a separate training needs analysis on food business owners in both counties and identify training topics.
8. Partner with Dundalk IT, and other relevant third level institutions, to identify where food technology can assist food businesses in the area. Devise training programmes on the back of this analysis.
9. Maximise awareness and participation of local food stakeholders re all national food training programmes.
10. Design and co-ordinate a short online training course for small producers specifically in order to provide instant access to relevant information.
11. Under the guidance of Fáilte Ireland build an on-going training programme to ensure the region excels in its delivery of the food in tourism product and customer service. Consider Dundalk IT Culinary Arts team, and other relevant culinary arts courses, for the delivery partner.
12. Establish an Entrepreneurial Training Scheme with assistance from LEO and/or local councils with regard to funding an resource.
13. Use the Food Network as an information channel for all programmes.

9.6. Implement the Strategy

VISION: To implement the Boyne Valley Food Strategy effectively through the provision of sufficient resources and supports.

ACTIONS:

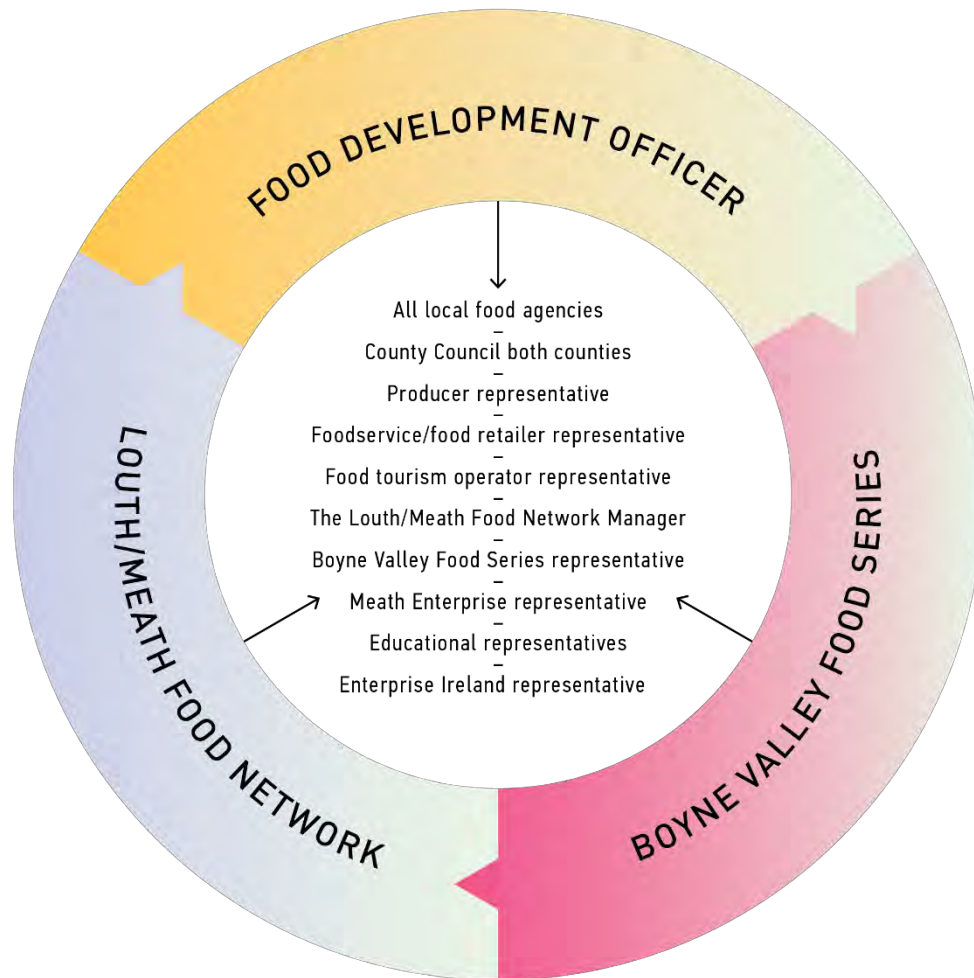
1. A gradual One-Year, Three-Year, and Five-Year approach to the strategy to be introduced.
2. Appoint of a Food Development Officer for 3 years, to be reviewed yearly, to co-ordinate all food related activity for the region and implement the strategy.
3. The formation of strategy steering group to guide the strategy implementation. This group will meet 4 times per year and will be made up of the following stakeholders:
 - a. All local food agencies.
 - b. County Council both counties.
 - c. Producer representative.
 - d. Foodservice/food retailer representative.
 - e. Food tourism operator representative.
 - f. The Louth/Meath Food Network Manager.
 - g. Boyne Valley Food Series representative.
 - h. Meath Enterprise representative.
 - i. Educational representatives.
 - j. Enterprise Ireland representative.
4. The Food Development Officer (FDO) will report jointly to the chair of the steering group and the Head of Enterprise from one of the counties. They will be based at one of the LEO offices.
5. With regard to the Food Series, it is envisaged that the TUS interns would continue their role within the series and would be managed by the FDO.
6. The role of the FDO will be as follows:
 - To drive the strategy action implementation through others.
 - To act as a conduit for action and activity in the food sector in both counties.
 - To ensure quarterly strategy steering group meetings occur and follow up actions are implemented.
 - To provide the steering group with updates on progress in accordance with the timescales set out in the strategy.
 - To liaise with all food agencies re: their involvement in the strategy implementation.
 - To support food stakeholder volunteers running events with information, advice.
 - To liaise with the Boyne Valley Series team and support their initiatives. Act as a “driver” for the Series.
 - To liaise with the Louth/Meath Food Network contractor and ensure the network is meeting its KPI’s. Organise quarterly review meetings. Act as a “driver” for the network.
 - Be expert at funding sources and communicate this information to relevant stakeholders.
 - To jointing report to the LEOs in Louth and Meath and keep them informed of progress.
 - Act a source of knowledge and a referral point for mentor supports, training etc. provided by LEO, LEADER, Bord Bia and other agencies linked to food.

- Be seen as the “go to” person for food in the region and command the respect of the stakeholders.
7. The role of the FDO will not include the following:
 - Taking workloads from others, which should be done by them.
 - Acting as a mentor for food businesses.
 - Full time Administrative capacity.
 8. The strategy Implementation will largely take place via the following channels:
 - a. The Food Development Officer.
 - b. Boyne Valley Food Series.
 - c. Louth/Meath Food Network.
 9. Cross agency support for, and involvement in, the strategy implementation will be vital. The role of both County Councils will be to ensure this support takes place.
 10. Financial support for the strategy will be a key enabler. It is envisaged that this funding will be provided by multiple agencies. Both Council Councils should identify which agency partners suit best specific work streams, and lead discussions with these to secure funding.
 11. Building on the existing strategies for the region will be mandatory and no duplication work streams should take place. The spirit of each existing strategy should be embraced by the Food Strategy:
 - Meath Economic Development Strategy.
 - Boyne Valley Tourism Strategy.
 - Louth Local Economic and Community Plan.
 - Mid-East Region Action plan for jobs.
 - Meath Local Economic and Community Plan.
 - Louth Tourism and Heritage Action Plan.
 - North East/North West Action Plan for Jobs and Heritage Plan.
 12. Support Panel to attend monthly meetings with the FDO to discuss the strategy and implementation progress.
 13. The Economic Development Department of both Councils should conduct an annual review of the strategy implementation. An external full strategy implementation review should take place at year 3.
 14. Louth and Meath County Councils to ensure the Boyne Valley Food Strategy is a key component within overall policy for both counties.

Figure 9.6.1. illustrates the Boyne Valley Food Strategy Implementation structure. For a detailed composition of the structure please refer to Section 9.6.

Figure 9.6.1.

STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION STRUCTURE



APPENDIX 1: CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS STRATEGY

Government Agencies (10)

Food Producers (31)

Foodservice operators-hotels, cafes, restaurants etc. (19)

Other food stakeholder groups (6)

APPENDIX 2: REGIONAL AND LOCAL SUPPORTING STRATEGIES

Both Louth and Meath County Councils have economic and community development strategies which guide direction and planning. Food has already been identified as an opportunity area in a number of these strategies. Examples are:

2.1. Mid-East Region Action Plan for Jobs 2016-2017 (page 91):

Short Term Vision:

'To establish the region as a major national and international 'food start-up hub' by 2025, and to become recognised as a global model for regional economic development.'

Long Term Vision:

'That the 'Boyne Valley will be to food what Silicon Valley is to technology'.

The Boyne Valley Food Hub will strive to help:

- *Farmers and Agricultural Co-operatives to create new businesses based on value-added. Agricultural products and/or develop new markets for their existing commodities.*
- *Startup food companies with challenges such as exporting, financing, packaging technology, regulations, food claims, international food legislation, labelling legislation, sourcing raw materials, contract negotiations, market development, infrastructure requirements, etc.*
- *Existing small and mid-size Food/Agri companies seeking to develop new products and services, access new technologies, upgrade quality assurance capabilities, enter new global markets, train their workforce, expand and improve their operations, etc.'*

<https://www.djei.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Action-Plan-for-Jobs-Mid-East-Region-2016-2017.pdf>

2.2. North West/North East Action Plan for Jobs 2015-2017 p.106 (Chapter 14)

'Agriculture programmes at Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) facilitate the transformation to economically competitive and sustainable farm production technologies and systems, securing the long-term future of the Agriculture sector in Ireland. Graduates

contribute to the Agriculture and Agri-Food business sectors as well as being capable of developing smaller scale innovative rural enterprises.'

Vision:

'DkIT's vision is that the Institute would like to continue a suite of programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate level including research in the Sustainable Agriculture and Food area. It strives to be a region centre of excellence in the Agri-food area and in collaboration with Teagasc Ballyhaise Agricultural College provide progression opportunities for all students in the North East area thus contributing to the economic development of the Region.

DkIT would like to develop a 4 year programme in Agri Food Science. The proposed new programme would consolidate their experience in both the Agriculture and Food Science areas and also build on skills requirements identified in a number of recent national reports and strategy documents. These will be Food Science graduates who can support the extensive Agri-Food industry in the region.'

<https://www.djei.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Action-Plan-for-Jobs-North-East-North-West-2015-2017.pdf>

2.3. Fáilte Ireland Food Tourism Strategy 2014-2016 (Page 10)

- *'To provide the necessary thought leadership for food experience development in Ireland, acting as a catalyst for change and empowering others to achieve it.*
- *To gather and disseminate market insights and best practices which will inform all food experience developments in Irish tourism.*
- *To engage with national and local stakeholders to promote the concept of experience development, emphasise the role that food plays within it, and describe how the concept can be practically applied.*
- *To work with Food Ambassadors to continue raising awareness of the great Irish food experiences available and building our food reputation at home and abroad.*
- *To provide a suite of direct and online resources which contribute to the expansion of memorable food experiences throughout Ireland.*
- *To future-proof the industry by continuously identifying existing and potential capability gaps and liaising with education providers on how to bridge them.'*

http://www.failteireland.ie/FailteIreland/media/WebsiteStructure/Documents/2_Develop_Your_Business/3_Marketing_Toolkit/6_Food_Tourism/Food-Tourism-Plan-2014-2016-Executive-Summary.pdf?ext=.pdf

2.4. Louth Local Economic Community Plan 2016-2022

Section 8.1.6.

The Louth County Development Plan supports low-impact rural and marine resource-based industrial, commercial, business and service uses that contribute to diversification and growth of the rural economy, and which are intrinsically linked to the rural area. Louth LEADER programme's priorities reiterate the benefits of agricultural diversification, documented in the LEF's agriculture strategy and in the LECP, and states that among its key priorities will be:

- provision of tourism facilities: including the renovation of farm buildings for tourism purposes, walking, cycling, angling, pony trekking, and bird watching;*
- development of niche tourism and educational services such as arts and crafts, specialty food provision, and open farms.*
- development of farm shops selling home/locally grown and manufactured products; organic food production and marine based enterprises including mariculture; and low-impact rural and marine resource based industry/commercial/business.*

Section 8.1.5

Louth LEO promotes entrepreneurship, fosters business start-ups and develops existing micro and small businesses to drive job creation and to provide accessible high quality supports that will enhance businesses in County Louth. Its key priority is to promote job creation and job retention in the county.

www.louthcoco.ie

2.5. Louth Agriculture, Food and Fisheries Action Plan

- Promote and Market food standard units and development kitchens in Co. Louth.*
- Promote and market the food standard units and kitchens in An Grianan and Ardee Business Park which are available to assist start-ups*
- Assist the promoters of Ardee Business Park establish the town as a food hub in the region.*
- Investigate opportunities to develop new and innovative added value food products in the region.*
- Help design a dedicated food based interactive website for the region;*
- Assist Drogheda Enterprise Centre develop a competency in the training and marketing support for early stage food companies.*

www.louthcoco.ie

2.6. Louth Tourism and Heritage Action Plan 2015-2020

Section 3:

- *To develop a ‘nonpartisan’ Food Guide for restaurants and Cafes in Louth.*
- *To develop an Annual Award Structure to reward Good Food Establishments and Food Producers in Louth.*
- *To develop an effective marketing strategy for the restaurants, Cafes and Artisan Producers of Louth.*

www.louthcoco.ie

2.7. Economic Development Strategy for County Meath 2014-2022 (page 6):

As part of the strategy the section for “*Seeking New Opportunities’ through national strengths and convergence opportunities, and strong enterprise mix in sectors, lists the priorities for the region including the following:*

- *Agri-Food.*
- *ICT.*
- *Med-Tech.*
- *Pharma.*
- *Internationally traded services.*

www.meath.ie

2.8. Meath Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021:

Section 4.3.1

- *Develop the potential of the Boyne Valley as a visitor destination for the purpose of maximising the length of stay, level of enjoyment and economic return from national and international visitors, including through market research, programme development and partnership building to promote Boyne Valley locally and abroad.*
- *Renovate the Boyne Valley navigation along with ancillary heritage and culture initiatives.*
- *Facilitate the restoration of the Boyne Valley navigation and the development of the Boyne Valley Greenway along with ancillary heritage and culture initiatives.*
- *Develop the infrastructure for educational and pilgrimage tourism, walking routes, and access to local heritage activity tourism, festivals, food and crafts and improve access to local heritage.*
- *Devise and deliver educational programmes on the heritage of the Boyne Valley to “Boyne Valley Champions” Tourism members with those graduating becoming ‘Boyne Valley Ambassadors’.*
- *Support and co-ordinate festivals and events to maximise their economic potential.*

Section 4.3.3

- *'Implement a programme of cultural heritage initiatives to allow schools, communities and the private sector to creatively engage with and develop a sense of ownership of their local heritage.*
- *Improve access and interpretation of heritage sights and include beach/coastal areas in activities.*
- *Develop and support projects to engage local communities in caring for and presenting local heritage to their own community and to visitors.*
- *Promote and communicate the heritage of the County through publications, audio-guides, web and social media platforms.*
- *Link the Boyne Valley with Ireland's Ancient East as the 'master-region' in order to maximise on the opportunities that Ireland's Ancient East will bring the Boyne Valley in raising awareness of the abundance and quality of world class heritage available.'*

<http://www.meath.ie/Community/CommunityDevelopment/LocalCommunityDevelopmentCommittee/LocalEconomicandCommunityPlan/File,63724,en.pdf>

Sedo 2.9.

'Facilitate enterprise and employment development within County Meath through a streamlined and efficient local planning process.

Purpose:

Spatial Implementation- Promote our towns and strategic employment sites as the economic drivers for employment in Meath while acknowledging the role of the rural economy

Activity:

- *Promote the hierarchy of economic centers and targeted sectors in Meath with the objective of facilitating significant new enterprise development*
- *Examine pilot strategic sites to advance in Navan, Ashbourne, Kells and Dunboyne including targeting sectors and cluster opportunities. Develop and implement best practice to advance same.*
- *Ensure local planning processes in place aimed at ensuring a flexible and business friendly system that will facilitate employment opportunities.'*

2.9. Boyne Valley Tourism Strategy 2016-2020

Overall Objectives:

1. *'That the Boyne Valley is recognised as The Birthplace of Ireland's Ancient East.*
2. *Improve the quality of Boyne Valley Gateway towns and exploration bases to offer a higher level of tourism provision for visitors.*
3. *A structured and innovative calendar of events and festivals that will attract domestic and international visitors.*

4. *An integrated active outdoors approach that positions the Boyne Valley as a destination with quality activity resources, attractions, adventure and amenities.*
5. *Boyne Valley is recognised as the national food and craft drinks tourism destination.*
6. *Increased rural tourism focus to ensure a greater dispersion of visitors across the countryside and rich landscapes of the Boyne Valley.*

Food and Drink Outcome 20.5- Objectives for Food and Drink:

1. ***'Integrated Marketing-*** *Incorporate Boyne Valley Food messaging into product marketing that integrates food across a range of outdoor activity areas e.g. walking and cycling experiences combined with food experiences.*
2. ***'National Food Destination-*** *Develop an integrated food and drink approach that connects the new food innovation hub, food and drink production, cookery training, food retail and dining across the Boyne Valley to market the destination as a leading Irish food destination.*
3. ***'Signature Boyne Valley Food-*** *Create a Boyne Valley signature dish campaign where signature foods will be incorporated into destination and tourism venue marketing e.g. hotels, restaurants, cafes, attractions, towns and villages.*
4. ***'National Event-*** *Support the creation of a national food and drink festival that is combined with a supporting event theme e.g. music, entertainment, active destination, arts and culture.'*

Boyne Valley Tourism Strategy

2.10. County Meath Biodiversity Plan 2015-2020

'Action 6: *Formulate and promote guidance on biodiversity features on Meath's farms, including hedgerows, wetlands and grasslands, with a target audience of agro-environment scheme planners and the farming community. Guidance to include biodiversity importance, ecological services and appropriate management options.*

Action 13: *Develop an access to biodiversity programme at publically accessible sites to promote important habitat and species.*

Action 24: *Meath County Council to initiate a pilot project on the control of ragwort in partnership with landowners/farmers within selected pilot area.*

Action 25: *Meath IFA, in partnership with the Environmental Awareness Officer, Meath County Council, to develop and deliver an agriculture and environmental awareness schools education project.'*

APPENDIX 3: DESK RESEARCH CASE STUDIES

The Boyne Valley Food Strategy actions were enhanced through initiatives elsewhere across the globe which demonstrated a cohesive framework for the particular food region. Two examples of this included the 'Food Assembly' which provides a unique selling initiative for the benefit of local producers and the consumer, and also the transition town of Totnes and the 'Food Link' project, which focuses on ensuring the local consumer dedicates a percentage of their weekly shop to locally produced goods.

THE 'FOOD ASSEMBLY'- FRANCE

In July 2014, The Food Assembly, also known as *La Ruche qui dit Oui* in French, launched in the UK enabling the general public to purchase high-quality food while supporting small-scale producers, who create jobs and foster social well-being. Each Food Assembly is an independent and local project while remaining part of The Food Assembly collective. It is the local farmers and food makers and a unique community spirit that keeps the Network alive. Starting in France, and now a movement across Europe, there are more than 700 Assemblies which have opened.

Selling through The Food Assembly, farmers and food makers get over 80% for every product sold, compared to the 15%-25% that most supermarkets offer them. The Food Assembly connects you directly to local food producers through a fair and transparent retail model.

The food producers sell directly to you through The Food Assembly online market. Hosts organise the weekly online shop and the local pick-up market in your area. Thus, there is no middleman: Members pay the food producer directly, allowing them to earn over 80% for their hard work (in comparison to 15-25% through supermarkets). Food Assembly producers also know how much to harvest each week for orders, which means there's no food waste.

The Food Assembly offers a fair and transparent way of buying food: producers set their own price, and the service fees are fixed and well-balanced for the Host and The Food Assembly.

<https://laruchequiditoui.fr/en>

TOTNES FOOD LINK- DEVON, ENGLAND

The Totnes Food-Link project, in Devon England, seeks to strengthen the links between local producers (within a 30 mile radius of the town), and retailers and restaurants within the town, building confidence and loyalty between both parties.

Food-Link is being managed by Myrtle Cooper building on the strong networks developed over the past few years, to bring together local farmers, food processors and retailers to strengthen local food business connections, creating a stronger enabling environment for local food to be traded in our community.

Food-Link runs a campaign to encourage people in and around Totnes to shift a small proportion of their weekly food spend to local independent food shops and product. The project runs creative, visual and engaging series of events and activities locally.

The Food-Link project is exploring development of the following projects:

- A retail and wholesale Food Hub to provide a one-stop-shop for members of the public and the retailers to access the range of local produce available in the area.
- Marketing to promote local food and provide a story behind the produce, plus a Totnes label that simply and clearly identifies primary and secondary produce that are produced and sourced within 30 miles of the town. The development of a Saturday Local Produce Market.
- The development of a centralised distribution hub, where local food can be stored prior to being distributed to retailers around the town.

<https://www.transitiontowntotnes.org/groups/food-group/food-link-project/>