



The Food Coast Donegal  
Strategic Review & Recommendations  
for Future Development and Delivery  
2023 - 2026

# A *Recipe* for future growth



Rialtas na hÉireann  
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# 01. Introduction

Having progressed the food strategy within the region over the last decade, in 2022 the Local Enterprise Office Donegal commissioned a review of the strategy for the Food Coast Initiative. Following a tender process, James Burke and Associates (JB&A), were appointed to conduct a review of the landscape and to make recommendations for future direction.

# 02. Foreward

Welcome. We are delighted to present The Food Coast Donegal Strategic Review & Recommendations for Future Development and Delivery 2023 – 2026. The Food Coast is a regional branding initiative which was developed by the Local Enterprise Office Donegal.

The launch of this strategy marks a significant milestone in the culinary journey of Donegal, as we embark on a mission to make our beautiful region renowned for its exceptional food and drink.

Donegal, with its stunning landscapes, rich heritage, and vibrant community, has always been a place apart. The original Donegal food strategy was written in 2012; we're now building on that legacy, as we continue our mission to cultivate Donegal's reputation for extraordinary culinary experiences that will tantalise the taste buds of locals and visitors alike. The Food Coast Donegal Food Strategy is a recipe for future growth and lays the groundwork for this exciting gastronomic journey.

Our vision is clear: to create an environment where local food producers, artisans, restaurateurs, and chefs can thrive, showcasing the incredible flavours and diversity of Donegal's culinary offerings. Through this strategy, we aim to nurture a strong and sustainable food ecosystem, supporting the growth of our local economy, and celebrating the exceptional talents and resources abundant within our county, sharing them with the world.

The Food Coast Donegal Food Strategy is the culmination of extensive research, collaboration, and consultation with key stakeholders from across the region. It provides a comprehensive overview of the current status of the food landscape in Donegal and reflects the collective aspirations of those who are passionate about the art of food in Donegal.

Conducting the strategy review would not have been possible without the input of a wide group of Donegal food and beverage stakeholders, and agencies that support the food industry. Our sincere thanks to those who gave willingly of their time and expertise. We would also like to express my appreciation to the broader community of Donegal, whose support and enthusiasm will be pivotal in driving the success of our collective vision.

In the pages of this comprehensive plan, you will find a roadmap that outlines our ambitious goals and the strategies we will employ to achieve them. From promoting sustainable practices and fostering innovation in food production to enhancing culinary education and establishing Donegal as a sought-after food tourism destination, every aspect of this strategy is designed to elevate our food culture to new heights.

As we embark on this culinary odyssey, let us remember that our journey does not end with the launch of this strategy. It is merely the beginning of an exciting chapter in Donegal's food story.

We invite you all to join us on this remarkable voyage, as we savour the flavours, share the stories and work together to develop the abundance, potential and reputation that is Food Coast Donegal.

Thank You.



**Brenda Hegarty**  
Head Of Enterprise,  
LEO Donegal.



**John McLaughlin**  
Chief Executive,  
Donegal CoCo.

# 03 Executive Summary



The Food Coast Donegal was established in 2012. A further review on progress was conducted in 2015. The review in this document was undertaken during 2022 and established the following:

## 01.

Since its formation, the Food Coast has achieved some major accolades e.g., finalist of the Foodie Destinations 2019.

## 02.

The Food Coast network has run an active calendar of annual food and beverage activities which have brought a new dimension to the local landscape, and drawn attention to Donegal's food and beverage offer.

## 03.

At national level, there is general acceptance from stakeholders in the food industry that Donegal has taken its place as a credible food and beverage destination region.

## 04.

Like most other regions, there are challenges to be faced by the Food Coast initiative including breathing fresh energy into the landscape in a post pandemic environment.

Having conducted research, interviewed stakeholders and looked at national and international food and beverage strategies, this report recommends the following:

## 01.

The formation of two industry clusters of stakeholders who will own and drive the strategy within their own sector.

## 02.

Build a new model for local agency collaboration.

## 03.

The appointment of a small leadership team to guide the journey.

## 04.

Secure funding to appoint a full-time Food Development Officer.

## 05.

Drive an added value mindset in the food and beverage manufacturing sector.

## 06.

Become a champion of green and sustainability best practice.

The core strategic vision envisaged is to...

Empower and enable industry to own the Food Coast initiative and elevate the Donegal food and beverage offer to a new unique position on the national map. To ensure that all stakeholders across every food and beverage channel, and at all commercial life-stages, who engage with the Food Coast journey benefit from it.

# 04. Terms of Reference

The terms of reference set out in the original tender request were as follows:

## 01.

A review of the objectives and outcomes achieved measured against objectives and targets set.

## 02.

A review of the current operational and delivery model.

## 03.

Consultation with key stakeholders in particular food businesses in the county.

## 04.

A review of the project in the context of both the 10 Year Strategic Enterprise Development Plan and the LEO Enterprise Plan 2021-2024.

## 05.

A review and assessment of the positioning of the project vis-à-vis national and European policies.

## 06.

Identification of potential external funding sources for the project and in particular European funding opportunities.

## 07.

Recommendations for the future development and delivery of the project that will give added momentum and increase business buy-in and participation.

# 05. Methodology

The methodology for the strategy was based on a stage gate process. Each stage informed the next stage and reviews were conducted on completion of each. The stages are set out as follows:



# 06. Acknowledgement and Consultations Undertaken

Conducting the strategy review would not have been possible without the input of a wide group of Donegal food and beverage stakeholders, and agencies supporting the food industry. Our sincere thanks to those who gave willingly of their time and expertise.

In addition to those who contributed on a one-to-one basis, the following were also conducted:

**30** Respondents

An online food stakeholder survey

**53** Respondents

An online Donegal consumer survey.

**08** Attendees

A consumer focus group.

**20** Attendees

Two meetings with the Food Coast steering committee.

**06** Meetings

Face to face and online meetings with the Food Coast/LEO team.

**25** Meetings

Individual food stakeholder meetings.

A full list of those who engaged, and wider group meetings is listed in Appendix One.

# 07. Base Line Data for Donegal Food Sector

While no single database exists for the food sector, the following statistics were assembled during the research phase.

## FARMING

**6.9%**

County Donegal is the fourth largest county in Ireland with a land mass of 6.9% of the total area of the state.

**9,347**

total farms in 2020 with an average farm size of 27.4 HA (compared to 43.9 HA in the Southeast).

**81,462**

HA of rough grazing areas (one of the largest in the country). Donegal also has more comanage than most other counties.

**240**

farms in Donegal produce potatoes across 1,200 HA which makes Donegal fifth highest potato producing county in the state.

Other key farming statistics include the following for County Donegal (source CSO Ireland 2020):

**751,609**

sheep in the county (Donegal contains the largest number of sheep per county in Ireland).

**52,149**

pigs in the county.

**22,156**

dairy cows in the county.

**31,446**

laying poultry birds in Donegal/Sligo/Leitrim (not measured separately).

# 314,600

tonnes was the volume of landings in 2021 for Ireland.

# 197,300

tonnes of the landings were landed in Killybegs with a further 3,500 tonnes landed in Greencastle.

# 23

out of the 160 seafood processing companies in Ireland, are based in Donegal employing 853 staff, out of a total workforce in this sector nationally of 3,873 staff.

# BIM

acknowledge in their Report "The Business of Seafood 2021" Co. Donegal is an important area for Ireland's aquaculture sector.

# 112

direct jobs come from the aquaculture sector in Donegal Bay, where Finfish cultivation is the main driver of the aquaculture economy.

# 46

FTEs are employed at Mulroy Bay where again Finfish is the main driver.

# 78

FTEs are engaged in oyster cultivation in Trawenagh Bay.

# 2,649

tonnes of oyster production occurs in Donegal with 381 staff employed. This represents 24.9% of the national output.

# Donegal

has the second largest output on a regional basis.

# 8,021

Donegal's regional annual output from aquaculture is 8,021 tonnes.

# 3,052

Donegal has an annual output of 3,052 tonnes of salmon (2021) which represents 23.7% of annual output.

# 94

staff are employed in the salmon industry within Donegal, over 6 production units.



# 08.

## Donegal Food Journey

### A Decade of Progress

The original Donegal food strategy was written in 2012. This followed an extensive review of the local landscape and the creation of a road map to build a local food ecosystem. This original Donegal food and beverage strategy had at its core several key objectives as follows:

- › To increase direct employment through developing 5 new start-up businesses per year over the five-year period. (25 new start-up businesses employing 2 people each).
- › To increase revenues of existing producers by 20% within the five-year period.
- › To make Donegal famous for food.
- › To increase revenues of restaurants and food service operators focused on the consumer market, by 15% over the five-year period.
- › To be regarded nationally as a region of excellence for the strategic development of food.

Four years later in 2016 the original strategy was reviewed, the progress benchmarked, and a new set of priority pillars were created. These new pillars centered around the following:

- › Completion of any outstanding workstreams from the previous strategy and implementation of new recommendations.
- › Exploring the creation of community kitchens and incubation hubs. This was completed.
- › Development of a food series calendar. This was completed.
- › Development of a food tourism strategy. This was not completed by The Food Coast team, however there are several tourism initiatives running within the county.
- › Development of a food coast network. This was completed.
- › Putting appropriate resources in place to support the strategy roll out. This was completed.

Since the strategy review in 2016, an annual calendar of events has grown and expanded over the years. Sample events each year were as follows:

## 2018

- > NICHE food innovation project.
- > Food series initiatives established.
- > Food Starter programme completed.
- > Sponsored chowder cook off competition.

## 2019

- > Meet the producer/meet the buyer event.
- > Chester familiarisation trip.
- > Feast at the foot of Errigal event.
- > Food series calendar launched.
- > Foodie Towns award winner (Donegal Town) in the Foodie Destination award.
- > Hosted Eurotoques best practice trip.
- > Sponsored chowder cook off competition.
- > Hosted NICHE EU food innovation project.
- > 2 Food Starter programmes.

## 2020

- > Christmas gift guide produced.
- > Donegal food awards launched.
- > Buy Donegal campaign.
- > 2 Food Starter programmes.

## 2021

- > Launch of Food Coast Donegal producer directory by Pól Ó Conghaile, JP McMahon, Aoife Carrigy, and Kwangi Chan.
- > Food trend workshop.
- > Food packaging workshop.
- > Grow With Aldi briefing session.
- > Christmas gift guide produced.
- > Buy Donegal campaign.
- > St Patrick's day recipe ideas video produced.
- > Launched Food Profit Network (producer and food service)
- > 2 Food Starter programmes.

## 2022

- > Blas presentation.
- > Donegal signature seafood event.
- > Savour the Flavour of Donegal town festival.
- > Food photography and styling workshops.
- > Visit to St Joseph's University Philadelphia at planning stage.
- > Gifted consumer show presence.
- > Local producers at Blas finals.
- > Food innovation event – The Future of food.
- > Grow With Aldi briefing session.
- > 2 Food Starter programmes.

Some high-profile events/achievements during this period include the following:



Foodie Destinations 2019 finalist



Food producer directory launch



Network launch and establishment



NICHE EU project



Strong ongoing calendar of activities and events

Considerable work has also been done on setting up the Food Coast network, which now boasts 170 members. The strategy rollout has been supported by one of the team from the Local Enterprise Office in the form of a Food Coast Executive, who combines the food portfolio with other LEO work tasks.

Donegal has significantly raised its reputation, in regional and national media, as a food destination.



# 09. Review of Food Coast Objectives from 2015 and Outcomes

The original Food Coast Donegal strategy was created in 2012. A further review of this strategy was undertaken in 2016 when an updated set of objectives and priorities were created.

A review of the actions within these strategic priorities was undertaken as part of this review during 2022 and the table set out in Appendix Two allocates a status.

The review demonstrates that the majority of the actions identified in 2016 were achieved. Actions not achieved were largely due to the action becoming irrelevant over time, or COVID and other disruptions making it impossible to implement. A number of the actions outstanding are deemed to be still relevant and have been continued forward in the next action plan.



# 10. Overview of Donegal Food Landscape 2022

Progress has been significant over the last decade within the food and drink landscape in Donegal, having little resemblance on where it was a decade ago. While some businesses within the sector have emerged from the pandemic facing greater challenges, Donegal County now has a vibrant food and drink community. Evidence of an expanded number of quality food service operators, an impressive cohort of talented chefs and a creative calendar of food events instil confidence for rebuilding to pre pandemic levels.

Donegal, a county with a rich maritime heritage, is recognised within the industry as having an evolving and ever improving food scene, and many other regions now view Donegal as a benchmark region for inspiration. Despite its challenges of geography, it has also seen new emerging businesses over the last decade. This is particularly evident recently in the craft drinks sector where world class products have developed with the added value of immersive visitor experiences coming to the fore. The Food Coast itself have a committed network of supporters in its steering group, and its website is a show piece of local talent.

New initiatives are consistently emerging in the county, like the launch of the "Donegal Signature Seafood Event", the running of a food photography and food styling workshop as well as ongoing producer supports and a re-emerging 2022 event calendar. There is general agreement that Donegal offers a unique proposition in terms of geography, landscape, culture and now food and drink are an integral part of that unique story too.

A full review of the current status is available within the SWOT analysis in section 15.



2019 was a pinnacle year for the Donegal region for its food and drink reputation with an increasingly active calendar of activity, winning the national Foodie Destinations award and generally raising its reputation as a leader on the national landscape.

The pandemic impact was severe and, like with many other regions, halted the momentum, and had the effect of distracting stakeholders who had to prioritise the survival of their own businesses. The Food Coast evolved its activities during the lockdowns; however, the tremendous 2019 “movement” was all but derailed.

On the positive side, what followed during 2020 and 2021 was the “staycation” holiday focus by Irish travellers which created a sense of re discovery from which Donegal benefited. The focus on outdoor pursuits also augured well for the region which naturally offered readymade solutions.

Grocery spend on Irish brands had increased significantly during lockdown. Many shoppers were actively seeking out local products both for convenience, as the relatively less complex local supply chains had meant a wider availability of local products, but also because of greater trust in the safety of local products



and the desire to support local producers and businesses.

Consumer willingness to explore local food sourcing grew during lockdowns along with receptiveness to seeking out food trucks and new coffee solutions. While some of this has diminished there is a positive legacy to be capitalised on.

For many Donegal producers and food service operators, the fast move by consumers to embrace e-commerce allowed food and beverage businesses to embrace more direct selling routes to consumers. Some of these remain today opening up additional routes to market, previously unexplored by many.

The “Zoom meeting culture” and hybrid approach to meetings and events will potentially be an advantage for Food Coast communication plans and upskilling sessions in the future making attendance easier, by eliminating the requirement for travel on some occasions.

Brexit impacts for Donegal have been challenging. Those exporting to the UK have encountered challenges with delays and hidden supply chain costs.

At national level Brexit has already negatively affected the sector, with the export of food and drink products to UK falling 35%, from €641 million to €418 million, in the first two months of 2021, compared with the same period in 2018, according to a study from the Central Statistics Office, Food and Agriculture: A Value Chain Analysis.

The introduction of checks and controls on the export of food and beverage products from Ireland into UK will result in additional costs and the potential for delays. It is estimated that the costs associated with these as well as other non-tariff barriers arising from Brexit are equivalent to a 6-13% tariff.

As Brexit unfolds further in the northwest, counties like Donegal are likely to be impacted to a greater extent than other regions around the country. Recent research confirms Brexit is likely to significantly reduce bilateral trade flows between Ireland and the UK by up to 20%. Most small-

scale food/drink producers in Donegal have limited resources and are exposed to Brexit in a number of ways. Weaker sterling reduces spending power of UK consumers who, in turn, are being encouraged to buy more local UK produce.

While the UK is the most important export destination for smaller food producers, this does create an opportunity for Food Coast Donegal who can provide a marketing platform to extend their reach into EU mainland markets which Ireland has not exploited to any significant extent to date. The opportunity exists to examine food/drink import substitution opportunities which could arise from Brexit. Imports from the UK are significant, amounting to over €3.5b. Added value imports of prepared foods total almost €1.4b which include categories such as alcoholic beverages, soft drinks, confectionery, dairy products, fish and ready meals.



# 11. Food Coast Donegal: Policy Context

As part of the strategic review of the Food Coast initiative, national and regional policies were reviewed in order to provide clarity as to where the Food Coast strategy should be positioned. The key findings are as follows:

## 11.1 NATIONAL AND REGIONAL FOOD POLICY

There is a lack of a clearly defined regional food policy for small food businesses or local food infrastructure in Ireland. The Stakeholder Committee for Food Vision 2030 chaired by Minister for Agriculture Food Marine, is made up of representatives of the private sector and state agencies involved in the wider food industry but does not have any Regional Government or LEO representation, who have agency responsibility for early developing food companies. Donegal along with many other county councils have developed their own food strategy for their regions which is loosely aligned to Food Vision 2030.

### 11.1.1 Food Coast Donegal Alignment to EU Policy and Food Vision 2030:

Food Coast Donegal is closely aligned to sustainable food production policies as outlined in National Food Policy “Food Vision 2030”, EU’s “Farm to Fork Strategy”, “European Green Deal” and EU “Strategy for making Europe’s rural areas more prosperous”.

Food Coast Donegal programme is centred around locally produced food and drink products such as fish, seafood products, distilling and local artisan produce which create a unique point of difference, authenticity and heritage to underpin Donegal as a regional food destination and the protection of the environment in the area where they operate.

Food Coast Donegal’s brand supports the widely held perception that traditional and locally produced food products are better for the environment and consumers by supporting local, they are behaving in a more socially responsible manner. Sustainability plays an important

role in meeting consumer expectations which are linked to contribution to the local economy in Donegal and environmental sustainability. (This is aligned to Goal 1, Agri-Food Strategy 2030)

Regional food products from Food Coast Donegal, many of which are mainly handmade, strengthen the link between producers, stakeholders, and consumers who want to know where their food comes from and how it is produced. These are similar key factors contributing to the EU’s Farm to Fork policy and are a vehicle to support premiumisation which is directly linked to value creation at producer level, thus supporting equitable distribution of value-added in the local community. EU research has confirmed consumers are willing to pay a higher price for locally produced foods which are unique and differentiated from their mainstream equivalents, provided they demonstrate that origin is matched with unique attributes.

By supporting small and local producers, consumers feel they are behaving in a more socially responsible manner and engaging with local communities. (Aligned to Goal 2, Agri-Food Strategy 2030)

Food Coast Donegal producers provide valuable direct and indirect employment for skilled craft workers in areas such as fishing and seafood production, craft brewing distilling and baking together with a range of farming and horticulture skills which supports food tourism and the wider communities in rural areas of the northwest of Ireland where it’s difficult to find alternative employment. (Aligned to Goal 1, Agri-Food Strategy 2030)

The Food Coast Donegal initiative is compatible with the European Commission strategy for making Europe’s rural areas stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous by 2040 in line with Ireland’s membership to the Committee of Regions. Food Coast Donegal programme provides a stimulus for sustainable economic growth and food tourism development in the northwest of Ireland.

Food Coast Donegal as a regional food brand promotes the core values of Donegal Food and creates greater marketing scale with trade and consumer promotional activities for food tourism in Donegal. The programme benefits individual producers, hotels and restaurants in the region who normally lack resources or find it difficult to get access to high profile marketing and promotional events.

## 11.2 FOOD COAST DONEGAL AND NATIONAL INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT PLANS:

### 11.2.1 Regional Development Plans Northwest: (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment – DETE)

The northwest Regional Enterprise Plan – 2024 covers three counties – Sligo, Leitrim, and Donegal. It sits within the NUTS 3 ‘border region’ configuration with Leitrim and Donegal sharing a strategically important border with Northern Ireland. It mentions food and food innovation e.g., Food Coast Donegal cluster, Sligo Food Trail cluster, Taste Leitrim cluster/brand centred around the Drumshanbo food hub.

**Further Development of the Food Industry:** The generation of an increased number of new scalable start-up firms eligible for direct financial initiatives from the enterprise agencies. For example, the presence of the Organic Centre and The Food Hub has led to several new food businesses being established in Leitrim and in the development of the Taste Leitrim brand. The plan is to further enhance these developments in the northwest through strategic linkages and to progress the PGI application for boxty in the region. The development of sectoral initiatives and clusters at both local and regional level – e.g., LEO Donegal has been engaging pro-actively with the food, engineering, and creative sectors in the county.

**Local Enterprise Office:** Focus to 2024 The Local Enterprise Offices aims to promote entrepreneurship, foster business start-ups, and develop existing micro and small businesses to drive job creation and to provide accessible high-quality initiatives for business ideas. The northwest regional areas of strength are as follows: Food/Seafood and innovation sector – Each county in the northwest has a strong food brand – Sligo Food Trail,

Taste of Leitrim and Food Coast Donegal e.g., Total investment of €200,000 in the development of a Taste Leitrim Food Tourism and Enterprise Zone, consisting of a visitor centre, feasibility study, distribution unit, food events and training.

### 11.2.2 Donegal Strategic Enterprise Development Plan 2030: Donegal County Council and Local Enterprise Office

The plan is built around 4 pillars of development, of which food is mentioned on several occasions as set out in 7.2.3.

1

Attract Investment to Transform Donegal Enterprise Development.

2

Grow Donegal’s Innovation Economy.

3

Building Distinct and Competitive Business Clusters.

4

Create Jobs and Develop the Workforce.

The Food Coast initiative is referenced several times within the plan.

**Pillar 1:** Makes reference to “Food Coast+” One of 7 sectors identified for development: under Food and Nutrition (Food Coast+) (p50). See expansion below.

**Pillar 3:** Recognises achievements to date “The Food Coast Donegal is the initiative from the Local Enterprise Office Donegal to support, celebrate and grow the Donegal food sector. The programme has a certification

*that demonstrates the taste and naturalness of Donegal Food and projects this image for the national and tourism image.” (p116)*

The plan advocates a “Cluster Strategy” and expresses confidence in food opportunities:

*“The Food industry has undergone significant changes in the past decades with changing consumer sentiment pushing an agenda for food that opens real possibilities for the Food Coast – principally” (p117)*

According to the plan, the Food Coast initiative should be developed to a Food Coast+ concept to research key areas of food and packaging to augment the position of food from Donegal, considering the trends that are occurring. Packaging should be used as a means of creating export potential but also new experiences in food.

**The focus should be on:**

- (i) Integrated food and diet and health which covers personalised diet management and traceability and;
- (ii) New products with enhanced packaging: (P117)

It recommends that the Food Coast+ strategy should be developed around 7 themes:

- |   |   |   |  |
|---|---|---|--|
| <p><b>01.</b><br/><b>Transparency</b><br/>Clear labelling of ingredients with ethical and responsible sourcing.</p>   | <p><b>02.</b><br/><b>Plant Based Alternatives</b><br/>Plant-based trends which is now moving food produce to the next level.</p>  | <p><b>03.</b><br/><b>Immune Health</b><br/>Food and beverage products that support immune health.</p>   | <p><b>04.</b><br/><b>Science and Nutrition</b><br/>Food and beverage with enhanced nutritional value, sustainability, or ethical impact.</p> |
| <p><b>05.</b><br/><b>Innovation in Food and Packaging</b><br/>People and in particular, tourists are interested in new sensory experiences in food that is healthy and natural.</p> | <p><b>06.</b><br/><b>Modern Nostalgia</b><br/>Consumers seek comfort in foods that remind them of happier, less turbulent times. Authentic dairy flavours and mouthfeel to dairy free and “better for you” products are driving demand.</p> | <p><b>07.</b><br/><b>Small and Authentic</b><br/>People are now seeking food companies with a story – a food concept that enables them to understand who is making the food and their background and structure.</p> |  |

The plan also highlights key companies in the Food Coast in Donegal with key assets: Nomadic Dairy producing oats and yoghurt snacks and yogurt drinks and currently exports over 90% of produce mainly to the UK market such as Tesco, Asda, Boots, Morrison’s and WH Smith as well as being stocked at many airports. Mulrines Ireland’s premier juice production company and owns several established and popular fruit juice brands. (p117)

The Plan explores the Blue Economy (the marine environment) and includes all those activities that are marine based or marine-related. This includes established sectors (i.e., fisheries, marine tourism) but also emerging (Ocean Energy, Biotechnology) which bring new opportunities for investment and hold huge potential for the future development of coastal communities.

Key companies in the Blue Economy in Donegal with key assets include: Errigal Bay Ireland’s largest processor of Wild Atlantic Shellfish and exports seafood products including crab, scallop, whelk, prawns, lobster, and shrimp to leading retailers, wholesalers and food service customers in Europe, Asia and North America. Irish Fish Cannery is the largest and only fish canning facility in Ireland and is seafood provider to several world-class leading brands in global markets.

**11.3 DONEGAL LOCAL ENTERPRISE OFFICE DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2021-2024**

The review (2017 – 2020) as part of this plan acknowledges the progress of the Food Coast e.g. the development of a new website, e-zine, food series and food directory within the Food Coast cluster which now has 170 members. (p26)

LEO facilitated a number of sector initiatives and clusters in particular in the engineering, food and creative sectors as well as facilitating peer learning e.g. The Food Coast ProfitNet.

**11.3.1 New Opportunity: Food Sector**

The plan recognises some key challenges such as low level of new business start-ups and the need for increased start-up activity in sectors including Food: Increased focus and the development of clusters within specific sectors such as Food and Nutrition. The development of clusters – even at an initial stage – is seen as fundamental to developing new levels of business start-ups and to even attract business to the county in the next years.

**Key Focus Areas for Donegal Enterprise:** Food/Sea Food Sector: Through the on-going delivery of the Food Coast programme, the facilitation of

the Food Coast cluster and the identification of key development opportunities. (p23)

Under vision mission and overarching objectives, the plan references support the further development of clusters in the engineering, food, creative, blue and ICT/Fintech sectors and where possible seek to strengthen the linkages between cluster firms with third level institutions and larger indigenous and FDI businesses.

Under the Strategic Priorities it states... Deliver the general SYOB and sector specific programmes such as Food Starter.

**Conclusion 01**

Food Coast Donegal is closely aligned to sustainable food production policies as outlined in National Food Policy “Food Vision 2030”, EU’s “Farm to Fork Strategy”, “European Green Deal” and EU “Strategy for making Europe’s rural areas more prosperous”.

**Conclusion 02**

Aspects of Food Coast Donegal referred to in the Donegal Strategic Enterprise Development Plan 2030 and the Donegal Local Enterprise Plan 2021 – 2024 should be incorporated into the future food and beverage strategy for the region, in particular the formation of a cluster strategy encouraging an autonomous approach.

**Conclusion 03**

The role of Food Coast Donegal needs to be more clearly defined as some lines of responsibility have become blurred. Food Coast Donegal must continue to develop its unique brand promise and deliver on actual experience to ensure that brand image and brand identity match, avoiding any perception gap.

# 12. Food Coast Donegal Funding

Funding support for the Food Coast Donegal will be a critical part of any future support plans. All available domestic and EU funds were reviewed in depth as part of the strategy review research phase with the objective of identifying the most probable future funding sources. (See Appendix Three)

## Conclusion 01

Donegal County Council through LEO should continue to provide essential seed capital funding for Food Coast Donegal on a diminishing scale until other sources of revenue come on-stream such as grants, possible membership fees, private sector partners and sponsorship. Each year there should be an increasing target percentage of revenue generated by Food Coast Donegal to contribute to a target of 50% self-sufficiency over a 5-year period.

## Conclusion 02

Other local funding partners with access to EU money e.g., LEADER, should be encouraged to take eligible aspects of Food Coast funding under their schemes. The Food Development Officer should work at identifying projects suitable for funding by other partner agencies.

## Conclusion 03

Greater use should be made of domestic funds on an annual basis e.g., the REDF Agri tourism grant scheme, the BIM Brexit Blue Economy Enterprise Development scheme.

## Conclusion 04

The Food Development Officer, in partnership with all local agency stakeholders, should identify projects requiring funding and also encourage an integrated agency approach to supporting The Food Coast Initiative.

# 13. A Glimpse at Irish Food Initiatives

As part of a bench marking exercise, a review was conducted on other regions around Ireland which demonstrates that the national landscape is vibrant with lots of different activity being conducted in different regions.

## WATERFORD



- > Taste Waterford is a membership-based food and drink network.
- > Established in 2017, it's supported by Waterford City and County Council, LEO Waterford, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Waterford Leader.
- > Food Brand = Food the Waterford Way – Food Trails.
- > Producer led network which has a membership fee of approx. €150. Producers nominate food service operators to be members.
- > Focused on building engagement and promoting loyalty within Waterford, and on building this brand and awareness of it nationally.
- > Innovative “BusBia” which runs weekly on a food trail.
- > 2019 Foodie Destinations winner.



### Key Learning Point:

Innovative food trail and focus on added value food tourism experiences.

## KILKENNY



- > Brand ‘Taste Kilkenny’ - savour the experience.
- > Published an original food strategy in 2009, new food strategy 2020.
- > Have made significant progress building their food credentials since then.
- > 2018 Foodie Destinations winner.
- > Core focus of the new strategy is the development of a food verification system which would be based on an open book model with food service operators – a first in Ireland.
- > New focus on outdoor dining experiences post Covid.
- > Savour Kilkenny is recognised as one of the most comprehensive food festivals on the national landscape.
- > ‘Kilkenny Producer Hampers’ marketed collaboratively.



### Key Learning Point:

Collaboration with destination marketing with focus on experiences. Development of pioneering verification system.

**MONAGHAN**

- › This county is characterised by some very large food manufacturers and smaller number of small to medium producers.
- › Launched a food strategy in 2017.
- › Incubation facility in Ballybay including a development kitchen.
- › A core focus of their strategy is to become “food innovation leaders”.
- › Operating under “Taste of Monaghan” brand.
- › Have a dedicated website for food producers and food service operators.
- › Mention of ‘celebrating local culture’ in food.
- › New Monaghan street food festival launched in 2019.

**Key Learning Point:**

Focus on food innovation and development.

**DINGLE PENINSULA**

- › Dingle Peninsula Food Branding Strategy Programme delivered in 2022.
- › Delivery of a modular training programme offering a blend of presentations, interactive workshops and discussion clinics covering topics such as use of local ingredients; agricultural best practice, food tourism, branding, sustainability, marketing and social media.
- › Early-stage network development.
- › Focus on sustainability and integration of food and landscape.
- › Iconic event in the ‘Dingle Food Festival’ (end of September) and the National ‘Blas na hEireann Awards’ held on the same weekend.

**Key Learning Point:**

Focus on sustainability and integrating the uniqueness of the Dingle landscape as a unique proposition.

**‘WEST LIMERICK**

- › Note ‘West Limerick’ carving out its own identity within the county.
- › Dedicated free programme for business delivered in 2022.
- › The 2021-2022 West Limerick Food Series is a FREE training programme for food, drink and hospitality businesses in the West Limerick region.
- › Business collaboration a key objective.
- › Food tourism front and centre.
- › No dedicated branding for Food Series, more marketed as a ‘Food Development Programme’.
- › Objectives include building the West Limerick Food tourism brand and network, organising food festivals and innovative alternatives, food tourism and funding growth, monetising the West Limerick Food brand.

**Key Learning Point:**

Focus on unique attributes of one area within the county with business collaboration and food tourism front and centre.

**WEXFORD**

- › ‘Wexford Food Family’ – producer focused brand.
- › B2B and B2C elements.
- › Supporters programme in place (Retail must list 10 local producers and food service at least 6 to be part).
- › Online supplier directory.
- › Financed by Leader, ties with local Chamber and some other EU funding.

**Key Learning Point:**

Choice of brand to focus on the rich array of producers as unique proposition.

**WICKLOW**

- › Very active, ‘up and coming’ food destination.
- › Launched food strategy in 2019.
- › Core focus is to get food stakeholders collaborating together.
- › Emerging calendar of food events and activities.
- › Strong cohort of alcohol beverage producers.
- › Strengthening infrastructure for producers wishing to scale up.
- › Unique community kitchen model.
- › Relaunch of ‘Taste of Wicklow’ in 2022, integrated with music.
- › Strong messaging around food and ecology.

**Key Learning Point:**

Unique focus on ecology, landscape and food.

**BOYNE VALLEY**

- › Umbrella brand, ‘Boyne Valley Flavours’ with three subdivisions; Producer Network, Boyne Valley Food Series and Place on a Plate. (Food Service commitment to local)
- › Full time Food Development Officer and part time admin back up.
- › Boyne Valley Food Series had 30/35 consumer facing events during 2022.
- › Signature event, ‘Samhain Festival’ in November.
- › Launched a food strategy in 2017.
- › Two counties (Louth and Meath) operate as one unit under this strategy.
- › Strong Boyne Valley food network with good stakeholder collaboration.
- › Strong food tourism focus and targeting 90-minute drive visitor from Dublin.
- › 2016 Foodie Destination winner, runner up in 2017/2018.
- › Plans to develop first centre of ‘Food and Culture’ in the country.

**Key Learning Point:**

Model of overarching brand, subdivided into tiers to respond to the different needs within the network. Focus on ‘out of season’ events.

# 14. A Glimpse at Global Food Regions and Leaders

As part of the desk research phase, a review was conducted of several international regions who are regarded as best in class for activities on their food landscape. In addition to this, an interview was conducted with Rebecca MacKenzie, President and CEO of The Culinary Tourism Alliance.

[www.culinarytourismalliance.com](http://www.culinarytourismalliance.com)



## 14.1 ONTARIO, CANADA *Integrating food into destination marketing*

The Ontario Culinary Alliance is an organisation that integrates destination marketing with food tourism within a thriving network.

They have both consumer facing activities and supports through provincial partnerships as well as resources and networking opportunities for different sector organisations. They work with alliance partners and the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario, in staging the annual Ontario Culinary Tourism Awards, to celebrate grassroots development of food tourism in the province.

Some of the services provided to industry include 'experience forward storytelling, media relations and FAM trip planning, industry wide resource sharing, educational workshops, facilitated introductions between producers and restaurants, procurement audits and overhauls and networking opportunities for those in the food, tourism and hospitality industries'. In 2014 they developed the 'Feast On' Certification programme as a response to industry and third-party demand for verification of local food procurement in food service. This has been divided into three categories.

### 14.1.1 Experiences, Purveyors and Partners.

#### **Experiences:**

A programme focused on the food service industry with a commitment to supporting the local economy.

#### **Purveyors:**

Feast On® Purveyors are the growers, producers, suppliers, and distributors working towards putting more local food on local plates in Ontario. They're building their food culture and creating new opportunities for the agriculture and hospitality industries in what they do.

#### **Partners:**

An integral part of Feast On® are Programme Partners. These partner organisations support Ontario producers by providing a conduit to Ontario products, and education to increase consumer appetite for local food and drink in the food service, hospitality and tourism industries.



#### **Conclusion 1**

- > A regional strategy must be integrated with regional destination marketing agencies to gain strategic traction.
- > The Ontario Culinary Alliance has broken down the needs of the network into streams which achieve relevant industry goals and keep the network focused in its objectives as well as a clear communication strategy to both those within industry (B2B) and consumer facing (B2C).

## 14.2 FOOD ORGANISATION OF DENMARK (FOOD), DENMARK

### *Integrating food with nature, agriculture and culture*

FOOD is an organisation started in 2010 to nurture and feed the interest in Nordic and Danish gastronomy, nature, agriculture and culinary culture. It is a non-profit organisation supported by Danish food producers and public funds. Their key tag line is; 'We work to make food a path to growth, development and experiences'.

They do this through food experiences, dissemination, and development of projects for the benefit of the entire value chain in the food industry. They have divided their current activities into three key projects;

### 01.

European Region of Gastronomy, Food Scene of the Future, The Gastronomic Travel Team and 'Chef's Chef Talent' talent competition.

FOOD acts as the secretariat for the European Gastronomy Region (Central Jutland Region) in collaboration with Business Region Aarhus, Business Region MidtVest and the Department of Meals. In 2017, Aarhus Municipality and Central Region were awarded the title of European Gastronomy Region under the theme "Rethinking Good Food".

The title was awarded in recognition of the city and region's thriving and successful food culture, gastronomy and production, which is being rethought and developed throughout the region. Since 2017, the work with gastronomy in the Central Jutland Region has continued and is still under the title European Gastronomy Region. The gastronomy region offers, among other things, an annual event program filled with events and activities that celebrate good food and everything that comes with it.

The 'Food Scene of the Future' aims to strengthen the food industry after the global pandemic. As part of the project, they therefore make tailor-made courses for small and medium-sized food producers as well as restaurants throughout the country, offering advice on the challenges that have arisen coming out of Covid. Notably, the project is supported by the EU Social Fund, and is carried out as a collaboration between the Hotel and Restaurant School in Copenhagen and the Food Organization of Denmark.

### 02.

The Gastronomic Travel Team is a helping hand to Danish eateries who want inspiration and guidance to develop and elevate the dining experience through courses and training. It consists of a number of Danish top chefs and a group of communication and project professionals with in-depth knowledge of the restaurant and food industry.

The travel team is particularly targeted at restaurants and cafés, but e.g., fishmongers and butchers with food

production can also participate. At the same time, experience destinations such as museums, ports, local attractions have the opportunity to receive assistance in developing new experience products based on food and gastronomy. Courses for eateries or venues include, new inspirations, menu development using local ingredients, dishes for outdoor dining, kitchen workflows.

### 03.

Kokkenes Kokketalent' is a talent competition for young shooting stars in the cooking industry.

'Chefs Culinary Talent' is about the importance of good craftsmanship and classic dishes. Here, young chef talents compete in classic dishes prepared from good, Danish ingredients.

The competition is held over three semi-finals. The best from each semi-final advance to the grand final. Prior to the semi-finals, a masterclass is held for the participants, where they are taught by experienced chefs in the dishes to be made for the semi-finals.



#### Conclusion 2

- > An integrated approach between public/private bodies, as well as food with destination development, is a key goal to strategic success.
- > Sector specific projects serve to meet the needs of the food and drinks industry i.e. The Gastronomic Travel Team and 'Chefs Culinary Talent'.

## 14.3 CATALONIA

### *Food as a growth multiplier*

Catalonia is a region with traditions going back more than a thousand years, a land with its own culture and language that enjoys a mild Mediterranean climate and an unrivalled natural diversity. It is a region built on a wealth of contrasts that make the customs, traditions, and people of Catalonia absolutely unique.

Catalonia wanted to create a compelling proposition to take tourism beyond Barcelona and to ensure a sustainable future for the region. The Catalonia strategy states that 'Cuisine is geography, history

and culture. To taste and enjoy a country's culinary products is to explore all its traditions at once'. Catalonia's food story is one of its distinct landscape of 'sea and mountain'.

The strategy looked to food to deliver a growth multiplier in the region, focusing on four key pillars:

### 01.

#### Vineyards

Leveraging the legacy of Catalonian vineyards.

### 02.

#### Indoor Markets

The city council invested money for renovation and rescinded ratio rules on vendors selling ready-to-eat and raw ingredients.

### 03.

#### Upscale Cuisine

Catalonia has gained a reputation for fine dining and boasts many Michelin-star restaurants.

### 04.

#### Investment in Infrastructure

City councils increased rail and bus options. It was estimated that 44% of visitor spend was spent on food and beverages. For every €100 spent in a local business, 68% stayed in the local economy and 32% left. For every €100 spent in a non-local business, 43% stayed in the local economy and 57% left. In 2015, tourism generated over €10bn of in-destination spend for the autonomous region of Catalonia. A total of 40% of that went to food and beverage products and vendors.



#### Conclusion 3

- > Catalonia has used its unique landscape as mountains and sea to explore its culinary culture. This is something that could provide inspiration to Donegal.
- > Focus should be considered on tangible enablers for a region to become a food destination as above.



## 14.4 PERU

### World-leading Food Destination

The World Travel Awards (WTA) selected Peru as the World's Leading Culinary Destination in 2021 – this is thanks to the collaboration of different restaurants and associations, which have shown that innovation and tradition can work together when talking about Peruvian food.



Peru's gastronomic rise to the top over the past 15 years has become a source of national pride and a motor of the economy, as rising numbers of tourists travel to sample its original and varied cuisine. Peru recognised the value of its food culture for tourists and repackaged what it already had under a new umbrella proposition.

In 2015, PromPeru (the Peru Export and Tourism Promotion Board) launched an international tourism campaign, promoting its food offering by focusing on its accolades such as 'World's Leading Culinary Destination', leveraging upscale cuisine. However, since then, there has been an integrated approach to focus on the local traditions, dishes, cultures, and fusion that are uniquely Peruvian.

Globally, pre-pandemic, more people than ever (53% of travellers) chose their destination based on its gastronomy (IWTA) but less than 18% of travellers express "gourmet" as their primary PsychoCulinary profile, according to the World Food Travel Association. It stands to reason then that developing food and beverage tourism deserves extra attention and planning to yield its full economic and community potential.



#### Conclusion 4

- › Peru has proven that heritage, tradition, and innovation can work together to achieve a seismic shift in the proposition.
- › 'Gourmet' or high-end cuisine represents a small portion of culinary preference globally with the visitor placing extra value on authenticity, whilst fine dining is rising. Ireland has the opportunity to carve out more 'casual' options which are based on provenance, food heritage and unique landscapes providing an authentic food story.

## 14.5 THE NETHERLANDS

### Food/culture integration

The Dutch identified the seven key elements of their culture and integrated the food experience with each. Similar to Ireland, the Netherlands aims to not only maintain market share but to stimulate sustainable growth (25% to 2020).



This growth was achieved across three core areas:

1. Regional Spread
2. Seasonality
3. Value

The Dutch, recognising that their cuisine was not 'a household name' internationally, sought to change that perception. They segmented visitor experiences by Beach, Water, Cycling, Flowers, Amsterdam, Dutch Masters, Traditional Dutch (Heritage), and the New Dutch Creative Scene. But all is underwritten by food, which is seen as a core pillar of the efforts to enhance visitor satisfaction.



#### Conclusion 5

- › Food can serve as an underwriter when developing destination strategy and should be integrated into the experiential element of all visitor experience.
- › This new approach may be seen in the Fáilte Ireland Destination Experience Development Plans (DEDP) which integrates food and experience as part of the overall destination visitor experience. This should be referred to in the development of new experiences.

Ontario, Canada is focused on strong connections and integration with destination partners already in operation, but with a strong commercial focus that is consistently analysed.

Catalonia looked to food to deliver a growth multiplier in the region, focusing on four key pillars: vineyards, indoor markets, upscale cuisine and investment in infrastructure. Peru recognised the value of its food culture for tourists and repackaged it under a new umbrella proposition. Australia presented itself as 'the world's greatest restaurant', highlighting the diverse nature of its offering, and focusing on three elements of the food wine experience: People, Produce and Place – relying on farmers, chefs, winemakers and tourism operators to tell their stories.

The Dutch identified the seven key elements of their culture and integrated the food experience with each, focusing on regional spread, seasonality and value. Catalonia, which already had a good reputation for food and drink, enhanced its offering by focusing on four key areas. Peru, also known for the quality of its food, repackaged its offerings under a new umbrella theme. They used specific levers to change perception and amplify their offering. However, the Australian and Dutch examples are of particular relevance for Ireland. Both recognised that they did not have a high reputation globally for food and drink. Australia aggressively sought to close the gap between the clichéd view of its food and drink culture and the superb cuisines it has to offer ('the world's greatest restaurant'), while the Dutch made food and drink a core pillar of their efforts to enhance visitor satisfaction.

*According to the National Food and Drink Strategy from Fáilte Ireland 2018-2023, whilst Irish Food and Drink produce is gaining reputation overseas, thanks to our small island status, grass-based productions and growing sustainable practises, the connection between ingredient/product and Ireland as a place with a great food and drink experience is not yet fully realised. Our strategic focus, therefore, needs to be on shifting the emphasis by enhancing our national menu and amplifying its strong connection to people and authentic place.*

# 15. Key Research Findings

Following the 30 stakeholder interviews, online stakeholder and consumer research, and a series of discussions with local government agencies, the following summary provides a good overview of the current status of the food landscape in Donegal.



Seafood and coastal links (longest coastline in Ireland)



Large seafood processors and blue economy



Part of Wild Atlantic Way



Foodie Destination Finalist 2019 (a legacy asset)



Emerging craft beer and distillery scene



'Taste of Donegal' Event



Food Stakeholder 'Movement'



Increasing dining choices and growing chef community



Food Coast brand (B2B)



Sustainable small food producers and farms - unique foodscape



Key industry educational centres (ATU and Killybegs)

Using the feedback from all stakeholder groups, a SWOT analysis was conducted with the output as follows:



## Strengths

- › A general acceptance that good progress has been made over the last 8 years. The role that the LEO played in underpinning the development of The Food Coast was acknowledged repeatedly.
- › There is much greater recognition of Donegal within “trade stakeholders” as an active food region.
- › Stakeholders have more confidence as a group. There is evidence of good support for each other and comradery.
- › There is a sense of a “food community” and a functioning network (a structure to collaborate within and “trying to achieve something”).
- › An emerging and enthusiastic chef cohort is evident, and the number of good restaurants has grown in recent years.
- › There is agreement that there is a definite improvement in “the offer”.
- › The Food Coast brand appearance is viewed as strong.



## Weaknesses

- › There is some confusion about what the Food Coast is trying to achieve, and its priorities, among stakeholders.
- › The commercial worth of membership is questioned by some stakeholders.
- › The Food Coast initiative is seen as agency led (not industry driven) with a quantitative approach.
- › There is limited recognition and credibility of the Food Coast Donegal restaurant plaque.
- › There is poor consumer awareness of the Food Coast brand.
- › There is no division within the structure to cater for very different needs and business life stages.
- › Interaction with farmers and farm diversification is weak.
- › There is erosion of the authentic Donegal fishing story.
- › The bigger food manufacturing and processing companies are slow to participate in Food Coast events and activities.
- › There are not enough new food producers emerging which leads to a weak artisan base.



## Opportunities

- › Integration of Donegal food and beverage more overtly with the Wild Atlantic Way initiative.
- › Greater combined activity between agencies Failte Ireland/BIM/LEO/Donegal County Council to create a unique proposition.
- › Further harness campaigns already there such as ‘Taste the Atlantic’ (BIM/Failte Ireland) and the new DEDP plans for the county.
- › Strengthening ties with other neighbouring regional food strategies e.g., Derry.
- › There is an opportunity to forge stronger educational links with colleges in Letterkenny and Killybegs.
- › Enhance and expand food hub training facilities with ‘short, sharp, focused’ training from what is already there through DETB and college kitchen facilities.
- › New unique visitor experiences are emerging i.e., Crolly Distillery’ and ‘Fish Stop’ in Killybegs. These and others will enhance the consumer offer.
- › Due to location, there are a number of cross border funding initiatives which could be explored.
- › New schemes launched in 2022 to deal with Brexit are especially relevant to Donegal e.g., Brexit Blue Economy Enterprise Development Scheme.



## Threats

- › There are different post pandemic priorities for some food and beverage stakeholders, with little time for “community/voluntary” activities.
- › Staff/skill shortages in the food service sector could cause operators to “revert to the basics” and abandon their local food focus.
- › Economic uncertainty, recession and the potential impact on inward visitor numbers and disposable income could distract from local food priorities.
- › Proximity to Northern Ireland and any potential future Brexit changes may have an influence on the Donegal region.
- › Other regions are working hard on reigniting their food story and festivals post Covid, posing a threat to Donegal (a busy national food and beverage calendar).

Based on the research interviews, desk research and experiences in other regions the following was established:

## Key Trends:

The core trends within the Donegal food sector are:



### People (Business Owners)

- > Time poor/need to focus more on business continuity/recovery.
- > Less volunteerism.
- > Fatigue.
- > Keeping up with new skills.



### Business

- > Rising cost inputs.
- > Supply chain disruption.
- > Shortage of skilled labour/retention challenges.
- > Cost of labour and minimum wage increase.
- > Inflation and general challenging economic downturn.
- > Changing eating trends and patterns e.g., Free From, Veganism etc.



### Consumer

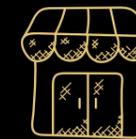
- > Cost of living concerns.
- > Health and wellbeing.
- > Responsible living/sustainability.
- > Seeking more engaging experiences and links to brands.
- > Time poor and looking for ways to minimise effort/maximise enjoyment.

## Needs:

The greatest needs identified by this report to be addressed by the Food Coast Strategy are as follows:



The need for food stakeholders to invest in research and development to support innovation.



The need for commercial success and in particular, to see this commercial success arising from any group or voluntary food initiatives.



The need to grow existing markets for Donegal food and identify new markets.



The need to embrace technology as a business enabler and communication tool.



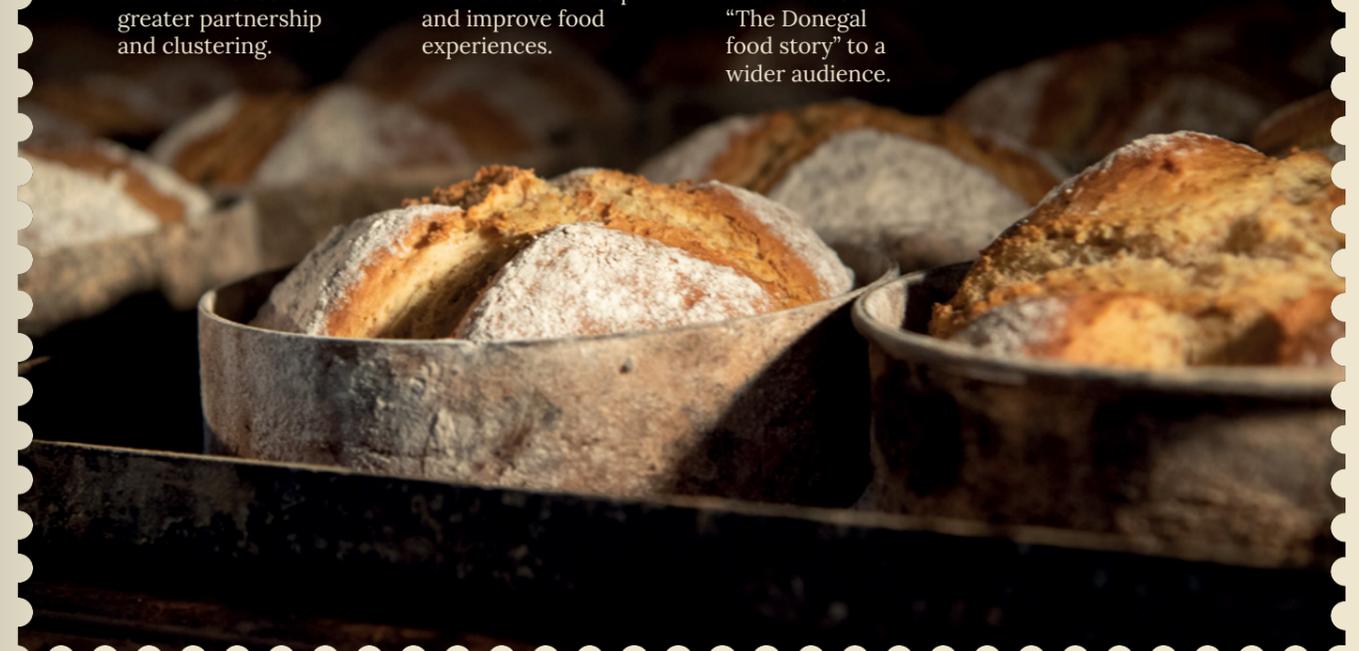
The need to foster greater partnership and clustering.



The need to develop and improve food experiences.



The need to tell "The Donegal food story" to a wider audience.



# 16. Recommendation for Future Development and Delivery with an Increase in Business Buy-in and Participation

The research findings conclude that great progress has been made over the last decade with regard to evolving the food and beverage agenda in Donegal. There is a general consensus that Donegal has taken its place at the national table and commands respect among its peers in other regions for what it has achieved with its Food Coast initiative.

The work over the last decade is now completed and the region can be proud of what it has achieved. It is now time to move forward to a new space, and the objectives set out in the following sections are focused on

supporting the region in the next chapter of its journey. The core focus should be on restructuring, reigniting the movement and enabling stakeholders. The aim of the next phase of the Food Coast journey,

is to elevate further the Donegal food and beverage offering and ensure that those who play an active role within it, reap commercial benefit.

*As part of the supports for this future journey a number of guiding principles have been established:*

## 01.

Change the focus from what has been there over the last decade and signal a move to a new higher positioning for the Food Coast initiative. Phase 1 of the Food Coast journey is over, and the objective has been achieved.

## 02.

The Food Coast initiative needs to transition to become an industry led initiative, from its current positioning of agency driven.

## 03.

It will need to be supported with an overarching strategy guided by three core values of Sustainability, Collaboration and Enterprise and Innovation (expanded in section 13).

## 04.

The initiative will need to be resourced with a full time Food Development Officer for a minimum of 36 months.

## 05.

The initiative will need to be supported with a strong communications plan to ensure that all stakeholders understand what is to be achieved and how to get there.

## 06.

The Food Coast brand should primarily be a B2B brand remaining true to the 'Core Values' above.

## 07.

In line with national policy The Food Coast should embrace the guiding values of sustainability and regeneration.

# 17. Strategic Objective

The core strategic vision envisaged is to...

Empower and enable industry to own the Food Coast initiative and elevate the Donegal food and beverage offering to a new unique position on the national map. To ensure that all stakeholders across every food and beverage channel, and at all commercial life-stages, who engage with the Food Coast journey benefit from it.

This will be achieved through focussing on 4 strategic pillars between 2023 and 2026.

<p><b>01.</b> </p> <p><b>Create an Industry Driven Food and Drink Eco System (Clusters):</b></p> <p>The creation of an industry driven ownership of the strategy through the establishment of two clusters were those from the same sectors will collaborate to drive the Donegal food and beverage agenda, guided by the Food Coast principles and the 3 core values.</p>	<p><b>02.</b> </p> <p><b>Build a new Model for Agency Collaboration:</b></p> <p>Create a practical working model that sees far greater inter agency collaboration and industry support in relation to the Food Coast and the development of the Donegal food and beverage sector.</p>	<p><b>03.</b> </p> <p><b>Drive an Added Value Mindset:</b></p> <p>Adopt the Food Coast+ approach as recommended by in the “Donegal 10 Year Strategic Enterprise Development Plan” in relation to producers “at scale, or capable of scaling”, who would be supported with research, trend analysis and innovation enablers thus enhancing the sector “added value” and export potential. ‘Added Value Mindset’ could also refer here to smaller producers etc who wish to embrace a visitor experience or food tourism.</p>	<p><b>04.</b> </p> <p><b>Become a Champion of Green and Sustainability Best Practice:</b></p> <p>Ensure that Donegal own the green, regeneration and sustainable spaces within the food and beverage arena and that the Food Coast and its members take ownership of this area.</p>
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## 17.1 PILLAR 01 Industry Clusters Explained



Pillar one recommends the creation of two industry clusters (expanding to three clusters at a later point) as an enabler for industry stakeholders to have greater ownership of the strategy and improved control for these stakeholders of the future of the Donegal food and beverage.

The cluster sectors will be:

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <p><b>01.</b></p> <p>Donegal Food Producer Cluster (B2B Focus).</p> | <p><b>02.</b></p> <p>Donegal Chef/Restaurant Owner Cluster (B2B Focus).</p> | <p><b>03.</b></p> <p>Donegal Food/Drink Experiences Cluster (B2B Focus).</p> <p><i>(Optional as a standalone cluster and will initially operate within the Producer Cluster).</i></p> |
|---|---|---|

### 17.1.1 How Each Cluster Will Operate

Each cluster will consist of the maximum number of engaged stakeholders from that sector, who will strive to collaborate and work together within their sector to promote and develop Donegal food and beverage as well as the Food Coast initiative.

Where larger projects are planned and the cluster identify that resources could be a challenge, they will apply for “animator” funding to support the project.

The clusters will set their own annual agenda and should create an action plan facilitated by the Food Development Officer and in line with Food Coast ethos and the 3 core values.

It is envisaged that much of the work which takes place in each cluster will be based on volunteerism supported by appropriate resources. There needs to be a clear focus on every event to ensure that there will be a commercial benefit to the businesses involved, and those who are inputting time can see a relationship between time put into commercial return for their business resulting.

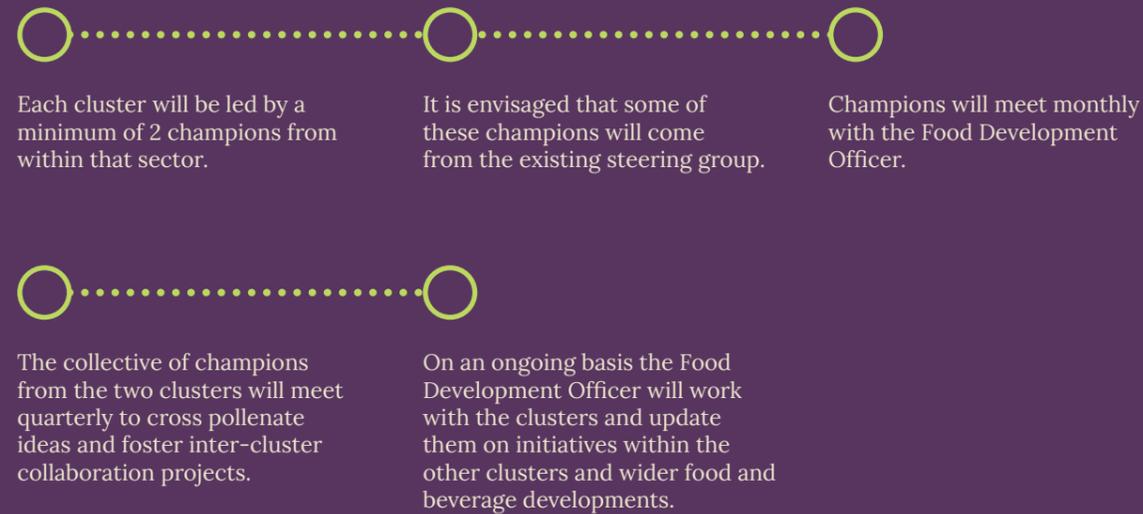
Supported by the Food Development Officer, each cluster will apply for funding from the appropriate agency for projects they intend to run.

While it is envisaged that the bulk of the activities within each cluster will be of a B2B nature (knowledge transfer, networking etc.) a cluster can decide to run its own B2C event.



### 17.1.2 Cluster Management

Each cluster will self-manage and organise its own workstreams supported by the Food Development Officer and appropriate agencies. The workstreams within each cluster will be guided by the Food Coast vision and the 3 values of Sustainability, Collaboration and Enterprise and Innovation.



Each cluster should be led by two “cluster champions”, who would be recognised within the county for representing best values of that group and capable of leading the activities proposed on a yearly basis. The role should be recruited on an annual basis (with the view to stay in the role for up to three years) so as to keep the individual motivated and also recognise that they are running their own business. It is proposed that the “Cluster Champions”

are showcased in a campaign to be the ‘sector faces’ or ambassadors for the year. Therefore, there is a reward for their efforts which will be reflected in a communications piece on their unique business stories which enhance the Food Coast Donegal brand.

### 17.1.3 Producer Cluster Focus

The Producer Cluster will facilitate producers at all levels from early stage through to those exporting. Its focus will be:



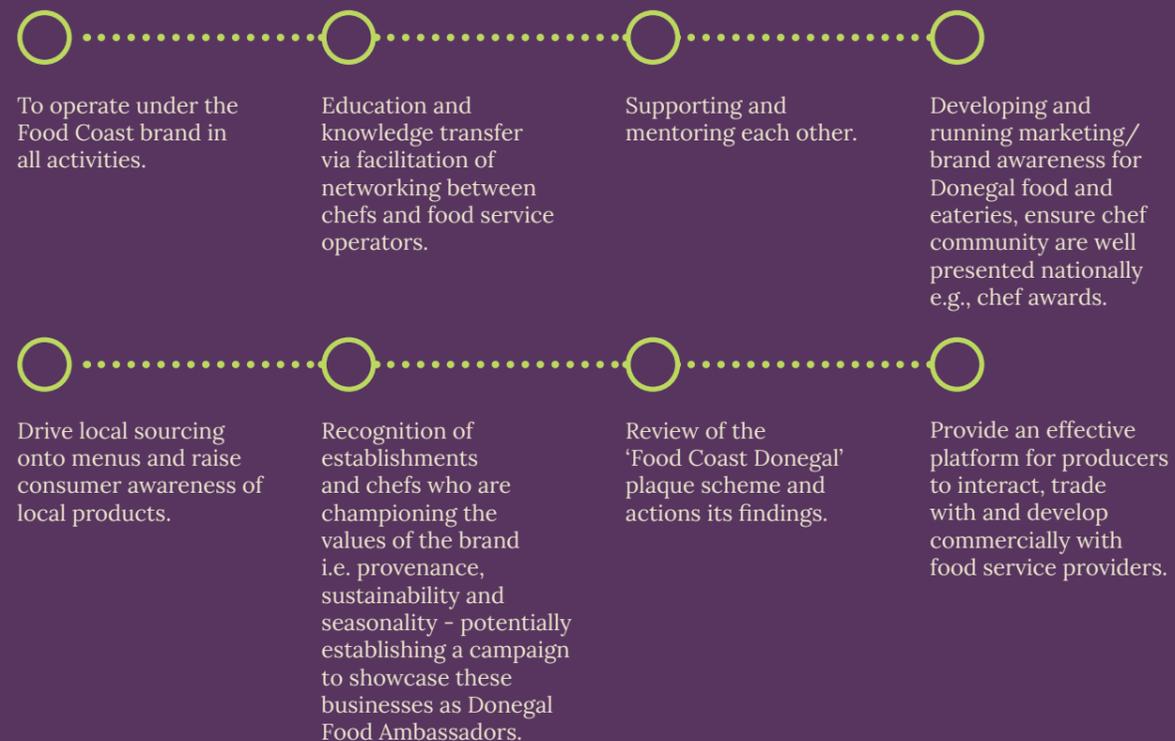
#### Sample Activities:

- > Buyer events/showcase
- > Export study trips
- > Exposure to trends
- > Science and global innovation stimulation
- > “Future of Food” focus
- > Scaling up/funding workstreams
- > Focus on making sustainability a good business decision etc.



### 17.1.4 Chef/Restaurant Owner Cluster Focus

The Chef/Restaurant Owner Cluster will facilitate chefs, café and bistro owners and food service operators/owners. Its focus will be:



Provide training and development for food service providers and owners in post covid recruitment and retention strategies.

**Sample activities:**

- > Producer and farm field trips,
- > Ordering platform for local food,
- > Kitchen innovation and skills workshops,
- > Develop signature Donegal dishes etc.

### 17.1.5 Food and Drink Experiences Cluster

*(This third cluster is optional in terms of standing alone, and may be incorporated into the Producer Cluster)*

By its nature, members of the Food and Drink Experiences Cluster, will also naturally be food producers e.g. breweries, distilleries, cheese makers, etc. If appropriate, and to avoid producers having to sit in two clusters, the Food and Drinks Experience Cluster could operate as a sub group of the Producer Cluster, at least in the initial stages of formation.

The Experiences Cluster will facilitate any food and beverage business which has a tourist/visitor experiential aspect e.g., tours etc. Its focus will be:



**Sample activities:**

- > Creating itineraries of saleable experiences,
- > Facilitating attendance at national and international B2B events,
- > Create a collaborative marketing campaign,
- > Adding value to the business through experiences, introduction to food tourism workshops.

# 17.2 PILLAR 02

## A New Agency Collaboration Model Explained



Over the last decade most local government agencies in Donegal have been involved in the food and beverage landscape in one way or another. Some have participated in the steering group for the Food Coast.

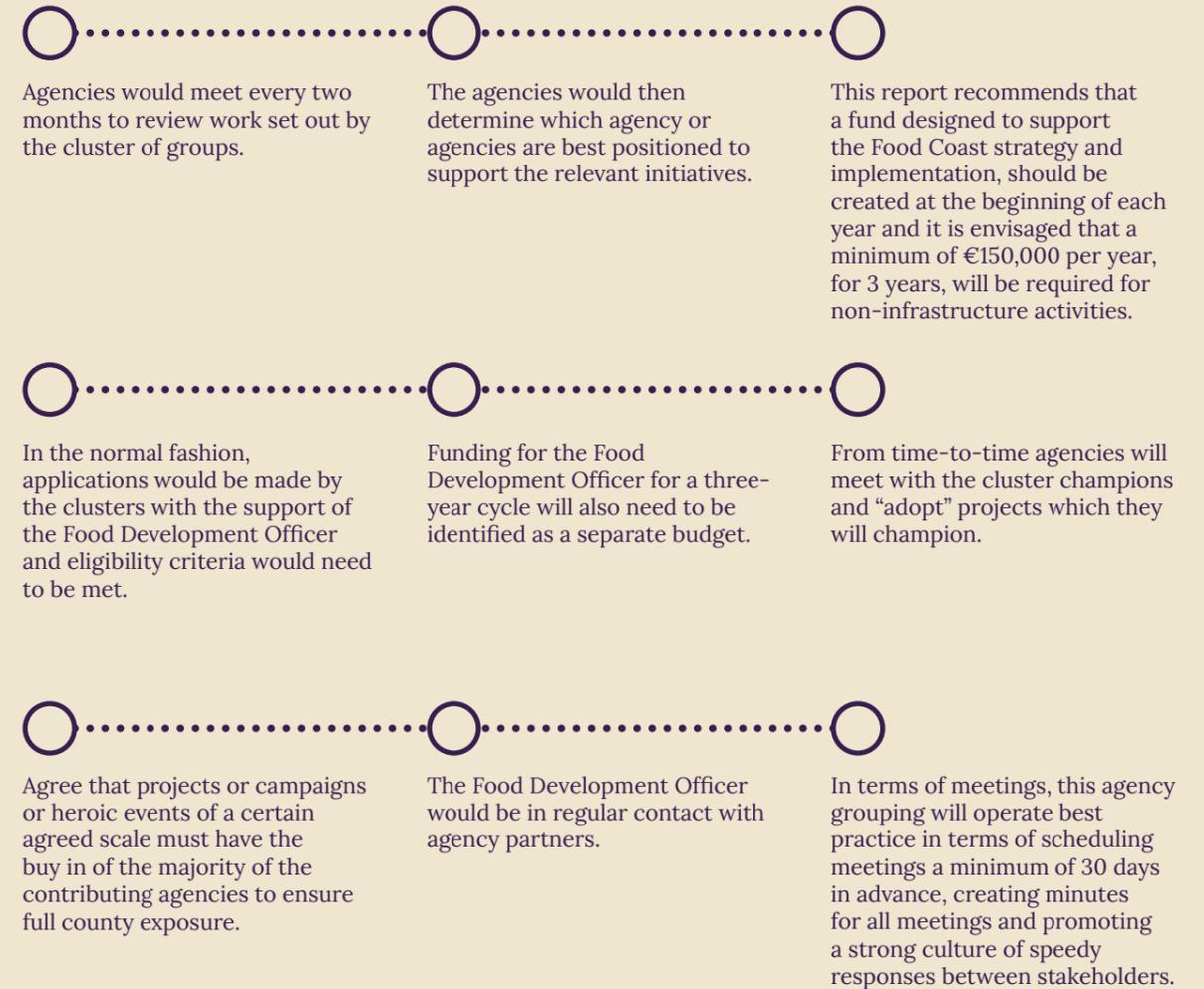
What is proposed going forward is a strengthening of how the collective of agencies operate with the objective of providing a more coordinated support for the overall Food Coast initiative and the three clusters.

The core objective of the agency collaboration model is to prevent projects for the food and beverage sector operating in different silos and encourage a coordinated approach to all activity by creating structures and communication between all of the agencies not seen in any other region in Ireland. In effect, it is envisaged that this new agency collaboration model will be best in class in Ireland and set the standard for other regions.



### 17.2.1 Operating Model

It is envisaged that the agency collaboration model would work as follows:



### 17.2.2 Possible Agency Partners

While the definitive list will be determined at local level, possible partners may include the following. A chair agency should lead the group:



# 17.3 PILLAR 03

## Drive an Added Value Mindset: Food Coast+ Explained



The nature of the Food Coast work to date has focused on the small to medium producer landscape. This cohort are most likely to be motivated to get involved in regional activities, and to some degree have most to gain from these activities. While some of the larger Donegal food and beverage manufacturers, and the seafood processors have been involved in the activities, this has been more of a supportive role for the initiatives.

The recently written "Donegal 10 Year Strategic Enterprise Development Plan" highlighted the need to "add value" to the producer community and had suggested this could be achieved through carving out a unique position for either the current large Donegal producers, and/or those capable of scaling up. That plan further suggested that this added value could be achieved through potential focus areas like integrated food, diet and health, and a focus on leading food and ingredients with particular focus on packaging capability.

This report recommends a separate commercial workstream be developed outside of the day-to-day Food Coast activities, but under the Food Coast brand, which would enable this Food Coast+ approach.

### 17.3.1 Key Areas of Focus

In order to achieve the Food Coast+ objective, the region and its producers will need to strengthen its capabilities and activities under the following headings:

- ..... ○ ..... ○  
A deeper harnessing of the knowledge base and expertise which exists within the local third level institutions.
- ..... ○ ..... ○  
Facilitate greater exposure for appropriate Donegal producers to the topics of food science, nutrition and agri-tech.
- ..... ○ ..... ○  
Create a more immersive annual calendar to ensure producers have a deep understanding of global food and beverage trends, and future predictions.
- ..... ○ ..... ○  
Stimulate greater levels of innovation by allowing Donegal producers greater access to innovation process and technical resources.
- ..... ○ ..... ○  
Improve access to innovation funding by creating greater awareness of existing funds and providing an additional Donegal food and beverage innovation fund.
- ..... ○ ..... ○  
Forming partnerships with packaging companies and those at the cutting edge of packaging innovation, so that Donegal producers have access to the latest developments.



**17.3.2 Sample Activities**

While the activities under this workstream should be industry driven and based on a needs analysis, which will need to be conducted, the following are examples which might be considered:

- ..... ○ ..... ○
- An information session hosted by Enterprise Ireland detailing the innovation funds available to producers.
- Site visits to key national innovation hubs e.g. The National Food Centre, Ashtown, Moorepark Technology Campus, etc.
- Twice yearly “hot house” global innovation workshops led by The Thinking House in Bord Bia or third-party global food and beverage trend specialists.
- ..... ○ ..... ○
- Study trips to international centres of food and beverage innovation.
- Develop a calendar of workshops with all key packaging companies to create easier collaborations with producers who are innovating.
- An innovation programme run over 6 months and led by a local third level institution which would have as its objective “putting food science and nutrition at the heart of participating businesses”.

**17.4 PILLAR 04**  
*Becoming a Champion of Green and Sustainability Explained*



The influence of environmental and sustainability related issues in the food and beverage sector is now unquestionable. National food agencies like Bord Bia recognised this several

years ago with their establishment of their Origin Green scheme, which is designed to position Irish producers and farmers as world leading in their commitment to the environment.



Furthermore, the consumer in increasing numbers is demanding respect for the environment, and for individual businesses to take their part in this movement.

An opportunity exists for the Food Coast Donegal to be the lead region in Ireland for its food and beverage sector under the green and sustainability heading. This report proposes that this topic becomes a core objective over the next 3 years, designed to run in parallel to the other work streams, but more importantly to underpin all other activity.

### 17.4.1 Sample Activities

Individual Food Coast members will already have made a start on applying green and sustainable initiatives to their businesses. The Food Coast itself has embraced local sourcing etc as base criteria. What is proposed next is a county wide approach for all sectors involved in the food and drink area.

Suggested activities include:



Run organic farming and growing information/training sessions for those considering transitioning existing land or entering commercial growing for the first time.



Achieving a target that all food service operators and retailers will buy 10% of their annual purchases from Donegal farmers/food and beverage producers by 2026.



Create an achievable and measurable 'auditing' system for businesses to achieve this.



Set up a pilot Food Waste Reduction Scheme.



Run one "zero km" meal annually to act a showcase for locally sourced product.



Adapt the Food Coast membership criteria to include (measurable) commitments to meeting green criteria or create a model of membership or reward based on a 'Certificate of Regeneration'.



Via Donegal County Council ensure all tenders involving food have local sourcing criteria included as essential e.g., staff restaurants.



Invite the input and collaboration with the main educational centres in the county in terms of education in the area through sharp, short and focused training for industry in embracing sustainability.



Create more strategic partnerships with cross border or international institutions/sector associations or networks in the area of sustainability to inspire, benchmark and partner with, for the longer term.



Encourage participation in Green for Micro scheme. Exploring the relevance of schemes like 50 Shades Greener for Donegal stakeholders. [www.fiftyshadesgreener.ie](http://www.fiftyshadesgreener.ie)



# 18. Food Coast Leadership Group



In addition to the clusters, a separate Leadership Group will take ownership of the overall Food Coast Strategy roll out and provide stewardship and direction. The Food Coast Donegal Leadership Group should represent the following stakeholders:



Producers (small to medium enterprises and from different stages of the business life cycle).



Food Service providers or owners (to include the Chef Community).



A representative from wider supporting agencies such as those previously listed.



A representative from key regional educational and training bodies.

## 18.1 Leadership Group Makeup

This group should be no more than 5/6 key individuals who are "thought leaders" from industry who have the ability and mindset to 'reset the dial' in terms of igniting the new food strategy, alongside the food development officer. This core group will meet initially on a more intensive basis to get the strategy roll out working on the structure of the cluster networks and an effective communication strategy to the rest of the wider network.

In order to recruit and retain effective members for this group, succinct and clear expectations should be drawn up in advance of skill sets, roles and the manner in which meetings and progress will be conducted. Time Management will be critical if the network is actively asking for high achieving individuals to give their voluntary

time and energy to this in order to roll out the new strategy with utmost effectiveness. As required, the Leadership Group will be joined by local agency representatives or Donegal County Council depending on the topics under discussion, and the requirement for additional supports.

The core responsibility of the Leadership group will be as follows:



To provide umbrella direction and to protect the Food Coast brand.



To remain true to the strategic goals.



Stimulate trifold communication between clusters.



To provide networking opportunities between the 3 clusters.



To be actively involved in their own sector cluster and provide leadership.



Understand the needs of the 3 cluster groups and provide resources to attain goals.



To liaise with various agencies on larger issues such as advocacy, funding, lobbying and representation for the food and beverage sector.



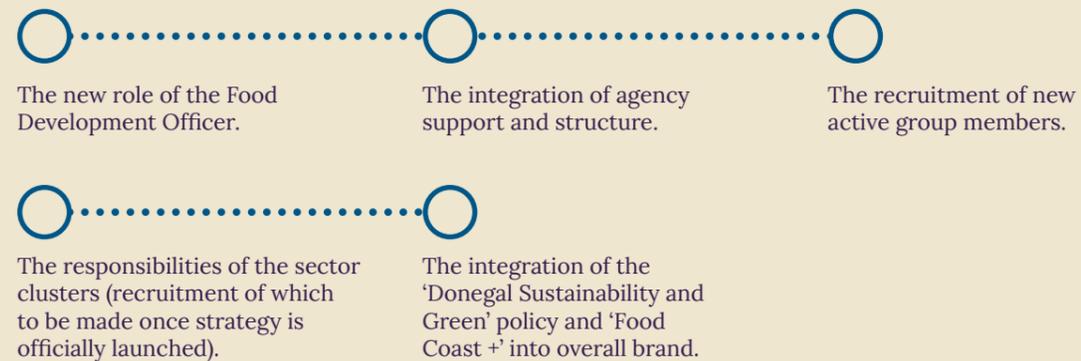
To represent the brand in reaction to larger regional or national issues as required.



# 19. Communications

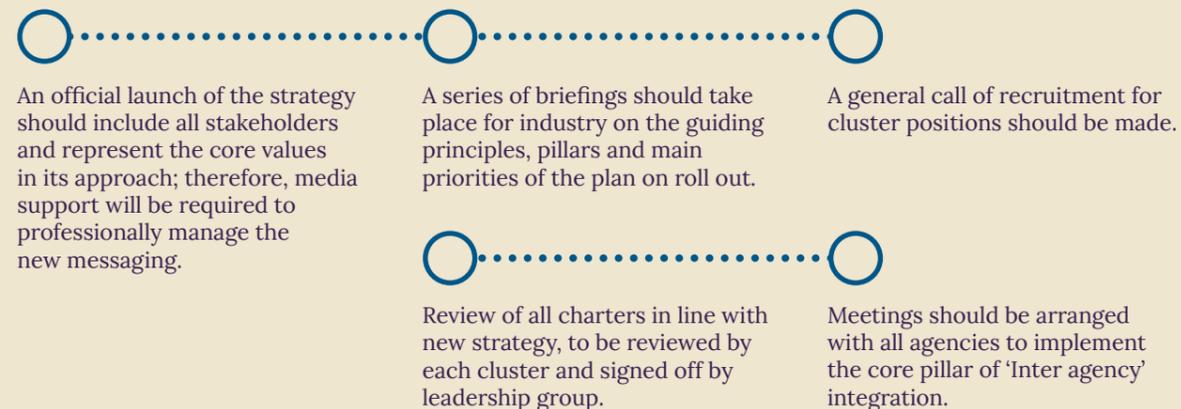
An effective and consistent communications plan will be vital to ensure the successful implementation of the food and drink strategy. This communication will take the form of initial instigation of the plan and the sustained efforts required with time to further develop progress.

As laid out in proposed structure, it is envisaged that the main 'Leadership Group' will be required to meet on more regular basis to initially project manage and support;

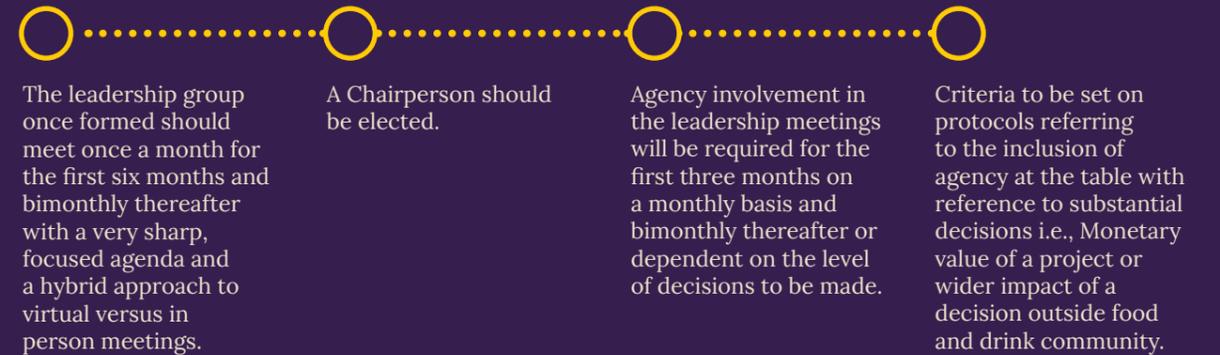


Once the above has been carefully instigated with the support of all stakeholders, a wider communications plan will be required to ensure 'buy in' from the wider relevant food and drinks community. This will be driven by the new Food Development Officer.

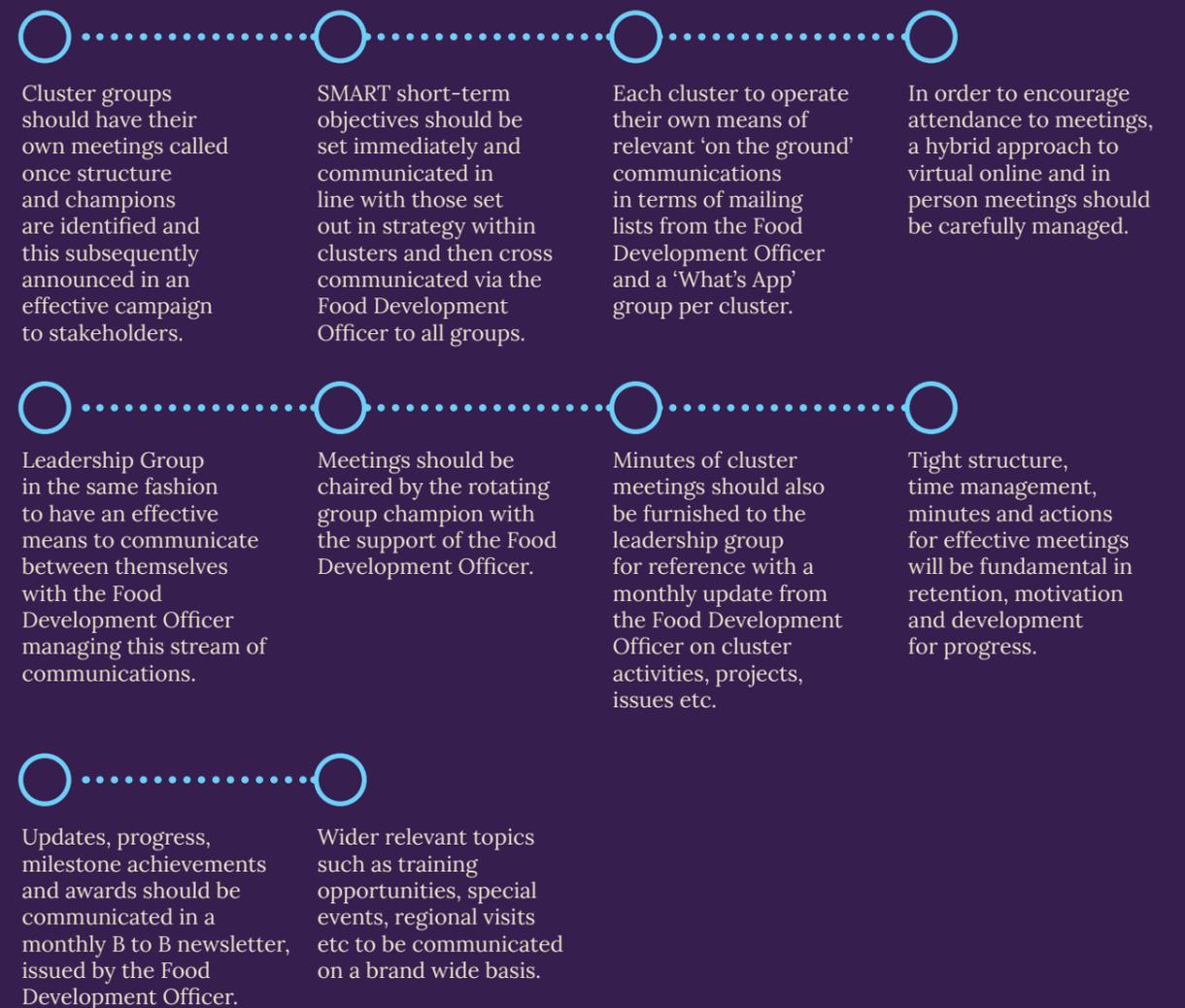
## Initial early stage communications:



## Group communication:



## Ongoing stakeholder communications:



# 20. Critical Enablers

The strategy will only function properly if the following enablers are put into place to support the journey.



A fulltime Food Development Office in place for 3 years.



Minimum funding of €150,000 per year to be allocated to various food projects.



A concerted effort by all agencies to function as one co-ordinated support vehicle.



Greater recognition of business owners and businesses acting as champions and investing time in the Food Coast initiative.



The majority focus of the Food Development Officer's time on B2B activities, enabling the clusters to run any B2C activities.

# 21. Summary

Since the formation of the original Food Coast Donegal strategy in 2012, the initiative has enjoyed significant success. Donegal's place on the national food and beverage map is now undisputed. The core foundations are now in place and it is now time for the Food Coast Donegal initiative to begin a new journey to elevate the Donegal food and beverage landscape to an even higher level.

This will be achieved by facilitating stakeholders, through a series of industry specific clusters, who will focus on creating bespoke actions for their sector. Local agency support for the initiative will be paramount and this will require a new interagency collaboration model.

# 22. Appendices

## 22.1 APPENDIX 1

A full list of those who engaged, and wider group meetings is listed below.

Organisation	Contact Person	Nature of Consultation
Atlantic Technological University	Nicola Dunnion	1:1 meeting
Uduras	Hugh Sweeney	1:1 meeting
Faillte Ireland	David Leonard	1:1 meeting
BIM	Richard Donnelly	1:1 meeting
Castle Grove Country House Hotel	Karoline Sweeney	1:1 meeting
Doherty Potatoes	Charlie Doherty	1:1 meeting
Ballyholey Farm	John Graham	1:1 meeting
New Kid Coffee	Richard Finney	1:1 meeting
Simply Irish	Joe Doherty	1:1 meeting
The Yellow Pepper Restaurant	Carol Meenan	1:1 meeting
Island Seafoods	Michael O'Donnell	1:1 meeting
Kinnegar Brewing	Rick La Vert	1:1 meeting
Sliabh Liag Distillers	James Doherty	1:1 meeting
Donegal Town Community Chamber	Mary McGettigan	1:1 meeting
ETB	Dearbhla Kelly	1:1 meeting
Lemon Tree Restaurant	Chris Molloy	1:1 meeting
Hughies Bar Killybegs	Hughie O'Donnell	1:1 meeting
MD Sandhouse Hotel Rosstown	Paul Diver	1:1 meeting
Irish Food Guide and Chef	Zack Gallagher	1:1 meeting
Filligans	Willie Filliang	1:1 meeting
Doherty Potatoes	Charlie Doherty	1:1 meeting
O'Donnells Bakery	Andrew McElhinney	1:1 meeting
Irish Fish Cannery	Michelle Bonner	1:1 meeting
Local Enterprise Office	Michael Tunney	1:1 meeting
Local Enterprise Office	Margaret Campbell	1:1 and group meetings
Local Enterprise Office	Eve-Anne McCarron	1:1 and group meetings

## 22.2 APPENDIX 2

### Review of 2015 Strategic Priorities and Actions

Strategic Priorities	Action	Responsibility	Outcome	Comment - LEO
<b>01.</b> Complete outstanding work streams	Restart the quarterly newsletter	LEO with input from all	Complete	Closed Future format to be determined.
	Identify projects which call for interagency collaboration	Food Steering Committee	Complete	Closed, was actioned through the NICHE project.
	Create a dedicated website for the Donegal Food Coast	LEO	Complete	Effectiveness of website to be reviewed Regular updates required
	Effectiveness of website to be reviewed Regular updates required	ATU Donegal & LEO	To be initiated	To be initiated. Prioritise a Training Needs Analysis for food manufacturers/Added value food businesses. Strengthen food business skillset.
	Target 4 national buyers and take pre-selected producers to their premises on a "mobile showcase"	LEO	Complete	Event took place at Tesco & Dunnes with poor engagement from other retailers. Host major retailers annually to encourage small producers to avail of their schemes through online information sessions. To date Food Academy, Grow with Aldi, Lidl Kickstart. Could be retained
	Set up a food cluster model	LEO	Complete	Profitnet trialled, producers/foodservice operators in one group not viable.
	Develop a partnership model to combine non-food festivals and food events	LEO & Donegal Tourism	To be initiated	To be initiated
	Train and upskill markets. Create training programme	To be initiated	To be initiated	Annual action
	Form a formal funded Donegal food marketing campaign	LEO/LEADER/Faillte Ireland	To be initiated	Explore feasibility of this
	Develop a route to market review of local seafood distribution solutions	BIM	To be initiated	BIM to explore
Run a campaign to get Donegal potatoes and seafood on the menu. Work stream to be linked to Donegal national event and Food Coast Network	LEO	To be initiated	Could be retained but expanded to Donegal Food Producers on Menu e.g. Lamb, seafood, include a meet the producer event.	
Create a Donegal food producer network to include all food stakeholders	LEO	In Progress		
Develop a large seafood processor study trip (BIM)	BIM	Complete	BIM to explore	
Plan a series of largescale food cookery events	LEO	In Progress	Feast at the foot of Errigal. Foodies Destinations Oakfield Park. Signature Seafood Event Killybegs. 1 per annum is recommended	

Strategic Priorities	Action	Responsibility	Outcome	Comment - LEO
<b>02.</b> Implementation of new recommendations	Develop quarterly or seasonal food themes to inspire producers and foodservice operators	LEO – Steering Group input from restaurant/chefs.	In Progress	Retain this workstream
	Create a physical food zone within the county	Donegal County Council with input from LEO	To be initiated	Feasibility Study Glenties Enterprise Centre completed. NICHE project, completed a study on the kitchen facilities in the county. Feasibility study for Ballyshannon enterprise space ongoing.
	Donegal Food Coast to assist with the TASTE Council Transition year project as part of the student education programme	LEO	To be initiated	Not relevant.
	Create a “Donegal food centre of excellence” for food based on a needs analysis of the region	ATU Donegal	In Progress	Food Hub or enterprise space would be desirable with educational and training supports
	Explore the creation of community gardens, social farms and allotments	Donegal County Council	To be initiated	Not relevant.
	Explore community projects	Donegal County Council	To be initiated	Not relevant.
	Explore running a retail product showcase	LEO	Complete	Event was predominantly attended by foodservice operators but was deemed to be a success.



Strategic Priorities	Action	Responsibility	Outcome	Comment - LEO
<b>03.</b> Explore community kitchens and incubations units	Conduct a short feasibility study within the county	LEO	Complete	Implementation of Recommendations/Set up Food Incubation Hub to include Testing
	All of the Donegal Food Coast consumer or public events should sit under the umbrella of an annual calendar based on the Boyne Valley Food Series model	LEO and Committee members	Complete	Could be retained. 35 events in 2020.
<b>04.</b> Develop a food series calendar	Develop a food tourism sub strategy in partnership with Failte Ireland	Failte Ireland with input from LEO, Donegal Tourism Unit.	To be initiated	
<b>05.</b> Develop a food tourism strategy	Funding of the food executive	LEO/Donegal County Council	Complete	LEO Competitive Fund 2019
	Funding of a contractor to run the food network	LEO	To be initiated	The food network was run by the executive employed under the LEO Competitive Fund.
	Funding to engage expertise to commence food series.	LEO	Complete	The executive employed under the LEO Competitive Fund completed this work.
	Funding for the community kitchens/incubation centre feasibility study	LEO	Complete	Completed via The NICHE project.
	Funding for the development of the food tourism strategy	Failte Ireland (to be discussed, possible Donegal tourism involvement)	To be initiated	TBC
<b>06.</b> Resource the strategy				

### Grant Support: ROI/EU/Cross Border

#### Rural Innovation and Development Fund (RIDF) DAFM Agri-Food Tourism Grant 2022

DAFM Grant funding to support innovative agri-food tourism projects which can demonstrate that they will be self-sustainable in the longer term and energising the rural economy by encouraging innovative job creation and sustainable enterprise development and should align with goals and actions of the Food Vision 2030 Strategy. Total Fund €300k max Grant €25k. Closed for 2022. Published on DAFM site January each year.

#### €70m European Union's Recovery Instrument (EURI) 100% funded by the EU incorporated into Ireland's Rural Development Programme which includes Leader Funding

€20 million announced in April, 2021 by Minister Humphreys, as part of Rural Future – the government's five-year strategy designed support rural communities in their recovering from the impact of COVID-19. The funding announced will see the development and enhancement of locally and rurally-led projects in areas such as enterprise development, climate change and the green, bio and circular economy and focus on developing the Digital Economy and Remote Working.

[www.gov.ie/en/press-release/36f0d-our-rural-future-minister-humphreys-welcomes-increased-eu-support-for-leader-programme](http://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/36f0d-our-rural-future-minister-humphreys-welcomes-increased-eu-support-for-leader-programme)

#### Rural Ireland: NDP

The Government's commitment to rural Ireland capital investment of €850m provided under the revised National Development Plan for rural development projects to 2025, across a range of areas such as remote working facilities, rural regeneration projects and outdoor amenities.

[www.gov.ie/en/news/47203-national-development-plan-2021-2030](http://www.gov.ie/en/news/47203-national-development-plan-2021-2030)

#### Rural Development Investment Programme (DRCD)

Revitalisation of rural town centres through the €1bn Rural Regeneration and Development Fund. Investment of €220m through the LEADER Programme. · Provision of funding for other programmes such as the Small-Scale Rural Projects (CLÁR), Town and Village Renewal, Local Improvement Scheme for non-public roads, Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme and Connected Hubs Fund.

[www.gov.ie/en/press-release/33b25-our-rural-future-minister-humphreys-and-minister-obrien-welcome-national-development-plan-funding-for-rural-and-community-development](http://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/33b25-our-rural-future-minister-humphreys-and-minister-obrien-welcome-national-development-plan-funding-for-rural-and-community-development)

#### Shared Island Initiative

Through the Shared Island Fund, €500m is provided out to 2025, ring-fenced for investment in North/South projects – including in research and innovation, education and training, sustainable transport and addressing the challenges of the Border regions – to take up the opportunities of our shared island.

[www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/c3417-shared-island](http://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/c3417-shared-island)

#### The PEACE PLUS programme (2021-2027 part of Interreg)

Peace Plus is a new cross-border EU funding programme for the 2021-2027 period, which will build on and continue the work of both the current Interreg VA and Peace IV programmes. Peace Plus will continue to support activities that contribute towards a prosperous and stable society in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland; including activities that promote peace and reconciliation and contribute to the cross border economic and territorial development of the region.

Funded by the European Union and UK Government, together with the Irish Government and Northern Ireland Executive – will also provide significant assistance for economic regeneration and transition in Northern Ireland and the six Southern border counties, including to enhance SME competitiveness and research and innovation capacity, and fund skills development as well as smart towns and villages.

[www.seupb.eu/sites/default/files/styles/PEACE%20PLUS%20Public%20Consultation/Peace%20Plus%20Programme%202021-2027%20-%20Programme%20Overview%20Report%20\(Final\).pdf](http://www.seupb.eu/sites/default/files/styles/PEACE%20PLUS%20Public%20Consultation/Peace%20Plus%20Programme%202021-2027%20-%20Programme%20Overview%20Report%20(Final).pdf)

#### INTERREG Cross-Border Programmes:

Interreg is one of 60 cross-border programmes operating under the main Interreg umbrella. The programme is due to run from 2017-2022 and encompasses the six Border counties of Ireland, Northern Ireland and part of Western Scotland. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment co-funds its "Research and Innovation" strand, in conjunction with its counterpart Department in Northern Ireland, the Department for the Economy. All funding has now been committed and a range of projects are underway. The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) contribution to the Programme is €240m (85%). In addition €43m (15%) will come from match-funding, raising the total value of the Programme to €283m.

[www.interregeurope.eu](http://www.interregeurope.eu)

#### Regional Enterprise Development Fund, Border Enterprise Development Fund and Regional Enterprise Transition Scheme (now Closed)

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment's Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF), [www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/funding-supports/REDF](http://www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/funding-supports/REDF), Border Enterprise Development Fund (BEDF) [www.bedf.org](http://www.bedf.org), and Regional Enterprise Transition Scheme (RETS) [www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/funding-supports/regional-enterprise-transition-scheme-feasibility](http://www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/funding-supports/regional-enterprise-transition-scheme-feasibility), bolsters the development and implementation of collaborative and innovative projects that can enable and sustain enterprise and employment growth in the regions. Under the RETS, BEDF and the three calls of the REDF to date, the North-West has secured €15.5m in funding for 11 enterprise projects. REDF is believed to be reopening in autumn 2022.

Enterprise Ireland's €9,500,000 Regional Enterprise Transition Scheme (RETS) is administered by the agency on behalf of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The scheme is part of Government's programme of assistance for regional enterprise development and assistance to regions facing socio-economic difficulties and transition as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic and other regional challenges associated with the UK's departure from the EU. Accordingly, the purpose of this funding scheme is to provide financial assistance to not-for-profit projects which can demonstrate an ability to deliver regional impact.

Feasibility Funding: In addition to the main Scheme, separate funding of €500,000 is also being provided for an associated RETS Feasibility Study Fund to support detailed evaluation of early-stage

opportunities for new impactful regional enterprise development projects. For further outline on this funding, see Regional Enterprise Transition Scheme – Feasibility (RETS-Feasibility Study) and further details of the RETS Feasibility Study Fund can be found in Section 3 of the Scheme Reference Document.

#### Brexit Blue Economy Enterprise Development Scheme

This new scheme launched in 2022 is targeted at businesses operating in the blue economy and located in communities within 10km of the coastline. The fund supports capital investment, business mentoring and capacity development and upskilling/training. The call for applications will be open until August 2023. Funding supports range between 50% to 80% depending on the beneficiary type.

[www.bim.ie/fisheries/funding/brexit-blue-economy-enterprise-development-scheme](http://www.bim.ie/fisheries/funding/brexit-blue-economy-enterprise-development-scheme)

## EU Programmes: Focused on Agri-Food

### Agri-Food Promotional Fund

The EU agri-food promotion fund is designed to support the EU's agri-food sector's competitiveness by promoting EU products and quality schemes on the internal market and in non-EU countries to sell EU products in an increasingly competitive global marketplace and increase the awareness and recognition of EU quality schemes.

Promotion campaigns and information measures about EU farm products and EU quality schemes are designed to open up new market opportunities for EU farmers and the wider food industry, as well as helping them build their existing business. It's the biggest annual EU Agri-Food promotional programme (€187m 2022) and available to representative bodies in member states of Food/Drink Industry sectors or national bodies such as Bord Bia, Ornua, Irish Spirits Assoc.

[www.agriland.ie/farming-news/eu-seeks-applications-for-agri-food-promotion-funding](http://www.agriland.ie/farming-news/eu-seeks-applications-for-agri-food-promotion-funding)

### EIT Food

European Institute of Technology: EIT Food is a pan-European driving innovation in the food sector in the regions of the UK, Ireland and Iceland and organises a number of Joint programmes. EIT Food is a consortium of more than 50 partners from leading businesses, research centres and universities across 13 countries that has been selected by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) as the Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC) in the agri-food sector. As one of the largest public-funded initiatives in the EU agri-food innovation space, the EIT Food KIC acts as a people-centric and resource-smart transformer of the European food system, driving consumer confidence and improving global health.

[www.eit.europa.eu](http://www.eit.europa.eu)

### 12.2.3 EUREKA Eurostar's

The EBRD helps SMEs access business advice in a number of countries, from the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean to Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. As a business advisor with the EBRD, I help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to develop and thrive and to tap into international best practices and industry advice to improve their performance and grow. They are dynamic companies with dedicated and passionate management.

[www.ebrd.com/home](http://www.ebrd.com/home)

### SMASCH

Smart Short Supply Chains Creating new leaders of the digital transformation in the European agri-food sector.

[www.smartchain-h2020.eu/short-food-supply-chains/](http://www.smartchain-h2020.eu/short-food-supply-chains/)

### Agri-food S3 Agri-food partnerships S3 Agri-food meetings

The Smart Specialisation Platform for Agri-Food (S3P Agri-Food) established at EU level aims to accelerate the development of joint investment projects in the EU by encouraging and supporting interregional cooperation in thematic areas based on smart specialisation priorities defined by regional and national government linked to agriculture and food. Through the S3P Agri-Food, EU regions and member states are able to implement more efficiently their smart specialisation strategies, and regional stakeholders benefit from the new cooperation opportunities with partners from other regions.

[www.smartchain-h2020.eu/news-events](http://www.smartchain-h2020.eu/news-events)

### Économusée

Économusée rural enterprise support to stimulate enterprise run by Teagasc in Ireland: Six step model for structuring visitor learning experience for artisan producers. A dedicated web-based sales platform developed for Économusée network members. The ENE programme looking to replicate and adapt the successful Économusée model for artisan business development and cultural tourism networks from Quebec, Canada to Europe. Craft International sought to bring more Irish artisan producers, particularly food producers, into the International Économusée Network and improve their viability through increased on-site and on-line sales. Programme needs to continue working with the original artisans, recruit new ones, and up-skill all of them and concurrently develop an international platform for sales and marketing. Project currently mothballed awaiting further funding: Teagasc.

[www.artisansaloeuvre.com](http://www.artisansaloeuvre.com)

### Latest EU Funds

The new range of EU Grants/Schemes is mainly focused to Green Deal, the environment and energy not Agri-Food food specific.



Action	Objective	Detail	Responsibility	Timeframe
Review effectiveness of Food Coast website	Improve Communication	Look at all aspects of website and determine how traffic etc can be improved e.g. trade buyers being sent directory link	LEO/Leadership Group/Clusters	QTR 4. 2023
Conduct a training needs analysis on food producers/added value food businesses	Upskilling and Knowledge Transfer	Conduct a TNA and identify where skillsets need to be improved. Build training programme	LEO/ATU Donegal	QTR 1. 2024
Encourage producers to avail of retailer producer development schemes	Sales Growth	Run info sessions for Food Academy, Lidl Kick Start, Grow With Aldi and maximise participant numbers on the Food Starter programme	LEO	Ongoing
Combine non-food festivals and food events	New Food Revenue Opportunities	Identify all non-food festivals and events e.g. music festivals, and encourage and support the organisers to include local food options	LEO/Donegal tourism	QTR 1. 2024
Explore feasibility of creating a Donegal food marketing campaign	Communicate the Donegal Food Story	Explore the feasibility of pulling all the annual Donegal Food campaigns (existing and new) onto one co-ordinated annual plan (costed and funding reliant)	LEO/LEADER/Failte Ireland	QTR 1. 2024
Explore the feasibility of creating local seafood distribution solutions	Get More Local Seafood onto Local Menus	Conduct a quick review of available third party existing local route to market distributors, and explore their willingness to stock and promote more local seafood	BIM	QTR 2. 2024
Explore running a campaign to get Donegal potatoes, lamb, seafood, etc onto Donegal menus	Get More Local Food onto Local Menus	This is an extension of the previous workstream to wider categories. Consider supporting receptive local distributors with promotional material, local food flyers etc	LEO/Leadership Group/Clusters	QTR 1. 2024
Run one large scale food/cookery event annually	A Celebration of Local Food and Commercial Sales For Those Featured	Based on previous events run determine which event will showcase best the Donegal Food Story	LEO/Leadership Group/Clusters	QTR 1. 2024
Develop quarterly or seasonal themes to inspire producers and food service operators	Communicating The Donegal Food Story and Extend The Food Calendar Activity Over 12 Months	Create a calendar of food themes to inspire the 3 food clusters and stimulate activity	LEO/Leadership Group/Clusters	QTR 4. 2023
Explore the Feasibility of creating a Donegal food centre of excellence e.g. food hub or enterprise space with educational and training supports	Improve Infrastructure and Food Business Supports	Conduct a Feasibility Study to determine appropriate food hub/kitchen facilities. Explore appropriate educational and upskills supports for tenants of these facilities	ED/LEO	QTR 4. 2023
Develop a food in tourism sub strategy in partnership with Failte Ireland	Capitalise on the Tourist Visitors Desire To Experience Local Food	Develop a dedicated food in tourism strategy for Donegal which interacts with the overall food strategy	Failte Ireland with input from LEO and Donegal tourism unit	QTR 1. 2024

### Implement Continuity Actions

Action	Objective	Detail	Responsibility	Timeframe
Expand the number of new food enterprises/products	Strengthen the food base	Set a target to support the emergence of five new food producers annually and ten new products	LEO	Ongoing
Organise best practice visits	Improve the knowledge transfer	Identify two domestic or international best practice visits annually e.g., visit another Irish food network, etc.	Food Development Officer	QTR 2. 2024 and twice yearly after
Strengthen the Food Coast brand and network communication (B2B)	Improved communication	Using the actions set out in the strategy document, strengthen ongoing communication between members (Food Coast brand should be viewed as a B2B brand)	Food Development Officer	QTR. 2. 2024 and ongoing
Increase employment in the food/drink sector	Improve commercial success	Develop a measurement process for those employed within the food and drink sector within the county and agree percentage growth on this base	LEO/Leadership Group/Clusters	QTR. 2. 2024
Increase food and drink export	Increase commercial success	Devise export workstreams to foster greater strength in this area e.g. greater uptake of TAME, higher use of LEO export advisors. Consider food and beverage export programme	LEO	QTR 4. 2023 and ongoing
Improve links to EEN	Improve visibility of Donegal food and beverage producers	Each Donegal producer should be registered on EEN portal	LEO	QTR 4. 2023
Increase the participation of Donegal producers at trade shows	Improve visibility of Donegal food and beverage producers	Research trade shows and of exhibitions via EEN and share with producers	Food Development Officer	QTR 2. 2024
Enter more awards	Celebrate Donegal success	Encourage all Food Coast members to enter relevant awards	Food Development Officer	QTR. 2 2024 and ongoing
Host national and international journalists	Tell the Donegal story	Proactively identify ten food and beverage journalists/influencer interactions annually with the objective of receiving free PR	Food Development Officer	QTR. 2 2024 and ongoing
Set up a communication platform for members	Facilitate peer knowledge sharing	Explore setting up either a Facebook closed group or a WhatsApp group	Food Development Officer	QTR 2. 2024 and ongoing

## Put in Place Critical Enablers

Action	Objective	Detail	Responsibility	Timeframe
Identify funding sources of €150,000 per year for three years	Ensure Funding is Available To Support The Strategy Implementation	Determine the role each agency can play to support the food strategy within their areas of focus and remit. Co-ordinate the funding available with the projects identified by the Clusters	DCC/LEO/ LEADER/ UDARAS/ Failte Ireland/ Enterprise Ireland/ Enterprise Training Board/ Donegal County Council /BIM	QTR 1. 2024
Put in place a full time Food Development Officer to support the strategy implementation	Ensure Co-Ordination and Management	Decide on the MOST appropriate model to provide a full-time resource e.g. full time employee, contractor etc	LEO/Leadership Group	QTR 2. 2024
Develop a new agency collaboration model	Align Local Government Agency Support	Set up a proactive working group among the local Government agencies	LEO/LEADER/ UDARAS/ Failte Ireland/ Enterprise Ireland/ Enterprise Training Board/ Donegal County Council /BIM	QTR 3. 2023
Put in place Food Coast leadership group (approx. 5 stakeholders)	Provide Strategic Food Leadership	Create a high-level group of food stakeholders who will lead the strategy implementation and provide leadership and vision	LEO	QTR 3. 2023

## Drive an Added Value Mindset – Food Coast+

Action	Objective	Detail	Responsibility	Timeframe
Set out an added value/ innovation and food trends calendar	Stimulate innovation	Put in place an innovation road map of activities, talks, workshops and knowledge transfer opportunities	LEO/Enterprise Ireland/APHA Innovation	QTR 4. 2023 and ongoing
Host an innovation funding session with EI and LEO	Increase awareness to innovation funds	Ensure full awareness is created of the various stands of innovation funding available to food and beverage producers from all agencies	LEO/Enterprise Ireland	QTR 4. 2023
Organise immersion visits to innovation hubs e.g. The National Food Centre	Showcase available resources	Partner with the likes of Teagasc and develop one or two onsite days focused on the facilities etc., available to support innovation. Also consider including specialist facilities like UCC micro distillery facility, etc	LEO	QTR 4. 2023
Run twice yearly hot house global innovation workshops	Stimulate innovation and new ideas	Partner with The Thinking House in Bord Bia to bring the latest food trends to Donegal producers in a facilitated hot house session which would support the participants in interpreting the trends for their business	LEO/Board Bia	QTR 1. 2024 and each year
Organise one study trip to an international centre for food and innovation	Expose Donegal food stakeholders to the global food innovation stage	For producers scaling up and those wanting to differentiate their range, organise a study trip to an international centre for food and beverage innovation e.g. University of Nottingham food innovation centre	LEO	QTR 2. 2024
Create a calendar for packaging innovation workshops	Increase awareness of latest packaging innovations	Develop a partnership scheme with some of Ireland's leading packaging companies which would allow Donegal producers to get "first glimpse" of new emerging packaging innovations e.g. Bunzl Ireland	LEO/APHA Innovation	QTR 2. 2024 and onwards
Explore the feasibility of running an innovation programme led by a third level institute focused on food science and nutrition	Create an intensive innovation hot house environment	In partnership with ATU Donegal, conduct a feasibility study and determine the appropriateness of running a food and beverage innovation programme (demand led)	LEO/ATU	QTR 1. 2024

## Become a Champion of Green and Sustainability Activities

Action	Objective	Detail	Responsibility	Timeframe
Ensure that green and sustainability issues are central to all Food Coast Donegal activities	To ensure Donegal food stakeholders excel in this topic	Build green and sustainable criteria into every food and beverage event, training sessions and generally make it part of the daily language	LEO	Ongoing
Organise organic farming/growing training sessions	Stimulate interest in organic and regenerative farming	Organise a series of practical immersion training to encourage a greater share of organic produce in Donegal	LEADER	QTR 2. 2024 and ongoing
Create a scheme to encourage local food service operators and retailers to buy 10% of their annual purchases from local sources	Drive up the value of the local food economy	Expand the current "point of sale" material to highlight local Donegal food on menu or instore and develop a more formalised system of highlighting local food and beverage	LEO/Leadership Group/Clusters	QTR 2. 2024
Create a measurement system to measure the achievement of local purchasing targets	Measure local food purchases	Similar to the scheme created by the culinary tourism alliance in Canada, develop a transparent measurement system for local purchases	LEO/Leadership Group/Clusters	QTR 4. 2024
Adapt Food Coast membership criteria to include "green methods"	Make green and sustainable central to Food Coast Donegal membership	Add in new criteria to the Food Coast membership e.g. commitment to waste reduction, packaging material used, recycling etc.	SDO	QTR 3. 2023
Work with Donegal County Council and all local agencies to ensure all public tenders have local food sourcing criteria where appropriate	Ensure local food is top of mind within local agencies	Where food is being purchased by DCC and other agencies for staff meals, functions and events, ensure that there is a local "food mile criteria" as part of the procurement to encourage local sourcing	Food Development Officer	QTR 2. 2024
Explore the relevance of third-party green and sustainable schemes for Food Coast members	Provide green accreditation	Encourage participation in Green for Micro scheme. Consider the relevance of using the Enso Initiatives <a href="http://www.ensoinitiatives.com">www.ensoinitiatives.com</a> or Fifty Shades Greener <a href="http://www.fiftyshadesgreener.ie">www.fiftyshadesgreener.ie</a>	Food Development Officer/LEO/SDO	QTR 3. 2024
Run a "zero KM" meal annually	Showcase what food and beverage can be produced at local level	Through the food service cluster organise a zero KM dinner through one or more of the Food Coast member businesses	Food service Cluster/SDO	QTR 1. 2024

## Create an Industry Driven Food and Drink Eco System (Clusters)

Action	Objective	Detail	Responsibility	Timeframe
Create three clusters – producer cluster, chef cluster and food/drink experiences cluster	Facilitate Food Coast Donegal members to own the food movement in Donegal	Set up three clusters as set out in the strategy review document. Each cluster would determine the activities most relevant to the sector and will drive these activities in line with the Food Development Officer	Food Coast members/Food Development Officer	QTR 3. 2023
Appoint two sector specific champions to lead each cluster	Provide cluster leadership	Ensure that each cluster has "an owner" from each of the three relevant sectors in the form of two industry stakeholders who will lead each cluster	LEO/Leadership Group	QTR 3. 2023
Provide training to the cluster champions on how to effectively lead the cluster – structure, KPI's, etc	Ensure good functionality and professionalism within each cluster	Develop training so as to ensure the cluster champions are supported in how best to run the cluster they are involved with and benefit from embracing best practice techniques e.g. meeting organisation and follow up, volunteerism, delegation, etc	LEO	QTR 4. 2023





## Get in Touch

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