



# HOW TO SOURCE LOCALLY

Whether you want to build your whole menu around luscious local produce or just steadily 'up' the number of ingredients you're sourcing from your area, it can be tricky knowing where to start.

To make sourcing local simple we've spoken to a number of the finest exponents, tapping them up for their tricks of the trade. These sourcing secrets come from catering managers at universities, Michelin star chefs, a chef at what must be the prince of provenance among staff canteens and an exec chef from a small pub group. Oh, and throw into the mix a cookery school creative director who's also a dab-hand at growing his own, and we'd like to think we've set you up with some top notch tips for ensuring there's a fabulous local flavour to your dishes.

## PUT YOUR WHOLESALER ON THE SPOT

There's an amazing larder on the doorstep of most restaurants. A great starting point for tapping into this networks of fabulous producers is to challenge your largest supplier to tell you what produce is available in your neighbourhood. Follow the advice of Nick Leach, Head of Catering Services at Portsmouth University who urges everyone to tackle their current suppliers head-on.

Nick says: "My first piece of advice would be to challenge your existing suppliers – the big wholesalers. Call them in, and say too them, tell me where you are sourcing your stuff from – and tell them that you'd like at least 25% to come from local producers. Then you'll start getting somewhere."

## TAP INTO THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY GRAPEVINE

Eyes down for a full larder. Instagram and Twitter are fast becoming the smart way to spot the best new producers in the neighbourhood. It's how Paul Collins, Executive Chef at Yeo Valley has found a number of his huge array of uber-local suppliers.

Paul says: "I'm always keeping a keen eye on social media for new producers – that's how we hooked up with our new wild watercress and mushroom supplier just a few miles from here on the Mendips."

Even more impressively, Conor Spacey, Head of Food Development at new caterer Food Space, found a new butcher on social media and in doing so tapped into a whole local food network including a beef, lamb and pork producer, baker and crisp maker – all of which he's using for a new site in Tipperary.



## GET YOUR BOOTS MUDDY

Getting the kitchen team to step outside the kitchen to meet the real food heroes – the people growing, rearing and creating incredible fresh produce – creates incredible opportunities and is often the starting point for lifelong working relationships. “Once you’ve got your wellies on it opens up a whole new world,” says Nick Leach.

Paul Collins at Yeo Valley says: “All of the meat we use is our own and is organic and we make sure we visit not just the farms but also the abattoir. It’s so important that the whole team has that exposure as it gives them an increased respect for the food they are working with and a greater understanding of where it’s come from.”

Enda McEvoy, Head Chef of Michelin-starred Loam in Galway says: “We get 80% of our veg from a local grower called Leaf and Roots. I talk with Fergal there every week and we meet up regularly throughout the year to talk about what he’s going to plant, what’ll work and what won’t. It’s a really rewarding way of working. I think it’s really important for my team to get out and visit the producers regularly too. That way, we keep in close touch with them and their product.”

## SEIZE THE SEASONS AND TAKE CONTROL

View each month as a menu creator and generator of fresh new tastes and flavours rather than seeing the seasons as a straight-jacket. Sourcing produce when it’s at its peak will generally reduce your food bill too.

Enda McEvoy at Loam sees the ever-changing culinary calendar as his creative compadre. “Some chefs might say that using only local produce limits what they can do. Personally, I need to limit the number of ingredients available to me or I get confused. Classical French cuisine was based around the colonies, using products that came from the other side of the world. That doesn’t seem right to me and I want to promote Irish cuisine. That means limiting the amount of ingredients but not the variety. Just think of all the different varieties of cabbage!”

Daryll Taylor, Creative Manager at Thyme, praises the influence of Mother Nature on his menus. He adds: “One of the obvious benefits of using local produce is that you are tied into the seasons, using what’s around at the time, the freshest most abundant produce at any moment. I find that makes cooking far more fun and enjoyable, it really keeps you on your toes and demands creativity.”



## PROMOTE YOUR PRODUCERS AND YOU'LL BOTH PROSPER

By showcasing the fabulous produce you're sourcing and the people producing it, you'll be feeding your customers' passion for provenance, connecting them with their food roots and helping grow your producers' business as well as your own. A recipe for success in anyone's book!

Enda McEvoy has certainly witnessed such an uplift in his corner of the West of Ireland. Enda says: "We can't build a community but we can support it. We wouldn't be here without them. They want to make the best possible product and it's up to us to showcase that as best we can. For me it is so much more than an exchange of money. I get a better product and a better community to live in."

Feeding thousands every day, Darren Procter is exerting even greater influence at Sheffield Hallam University, including a retail area dedicated to local produce. Darren says: "We can make a massive impact by shaping food culture with the thousands of students we are feeding on a daily basis. By working closely with local suppliers and then communicating that to our customers we are using fresh local ingredients as a means of educating our students."