Carlisle food, family and place: it's complicated

Inclusive placemaking considering business as actors in local communities

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This paper explores the authors' continuing journey of both observing, participating and encouraging the growth of the local food sector; family business; food entrepreneurs and place.

Local food is extremely important for place making because local food offers both the taste of its place and is also the product of that place. As part of our senses taste is a key to how we define our local space whether that is a home cooked meal (Purnell, 2015), or a local food or drink product that reminds us of our adopted home, as Scaramanga (2012, p71) notes "Local food, clothing and products of cultural industries are the existing material and sources of the unique character of each place." But what lies behind these products of place and why is that important?

The importance of the food sector to the economy as a whole is an emerging topic (Heaman & Morley, 2017) and there is also increased discussion on how firms in this sector affect the place in which they are based, for example, Omholt (2015 p235) suggests: "Several trends today are converging to make food and culinary places a central topic in place management and urban development. The food sector constitutes an important basis for place development and competitiveness".

Cox et al (2007) case study on a local Cumbrian family food business clearly demonstrates how firms in the food sector can have a profound effect on their place. It is perhaps that sense of embeddedness found in family food firms that allows them to be key drivers in creating a sense of place. For example, Zellweger et al (2014), suggests trans-generational family firms with either family recipes or close networks of local suppliers ensure a unique taste to the finished local product.

Local produce is also the product of a multitude of startup businesses who tend to start with either a local supply chain or a local market place and so become place makers in their own right creating employment and a route to market for other local businesses, as noted by Shrock et al (2016 p21) "Food is also a notable sector for maker entrepreneurship in New York City".

Young food entrepreneurs do have a direct effect on local supply chains, we have two examples of new food businesses (Bruce and Luke's (coffee roasters) and Lakeland Mues (muesli producers)) who have both created employment directly and by using (and acknowledging the expertise of) local web designers, graphic designers, packaging designers etc. have helped create a route to market for the owners of these businesses. Conversations with larger producers (such as Hawkshead Relish) suggests that this use of other local businesses with specific skills appears to be embedded in local food businesses and not just part of the start-up stage. When considering established family food firms, the impact can go beyond local to regional. Cox et al (2007), case study on Lakeland Beef which was a collaborative brand developed by Pioneer Food Services is a prime example of how entrepreneurial development of a food brand based on a local supply chain can create a route to market for more than the innovator of the supply chain. Our conversations with the current sales director of Pioneer Foods (5th generation family member) indicate that they are now the main supplier of Cumbrian reared beef across the region.

This paper explores how local food is defined and how the businesses within the supply chain for the local food network interact with each other to create the sense of place. It achieves this by reporting on the development of a local food map for Carlisle and its surrounding region, and a 'Local Food Show' event held to celebrate the local food sector.

The food map was based on previous work by the Campaign for Rural England's Food to Fork project[1] it was originally delivered by this papers authors and was based on Google Maps and has now been significantly upgraded by Thomas 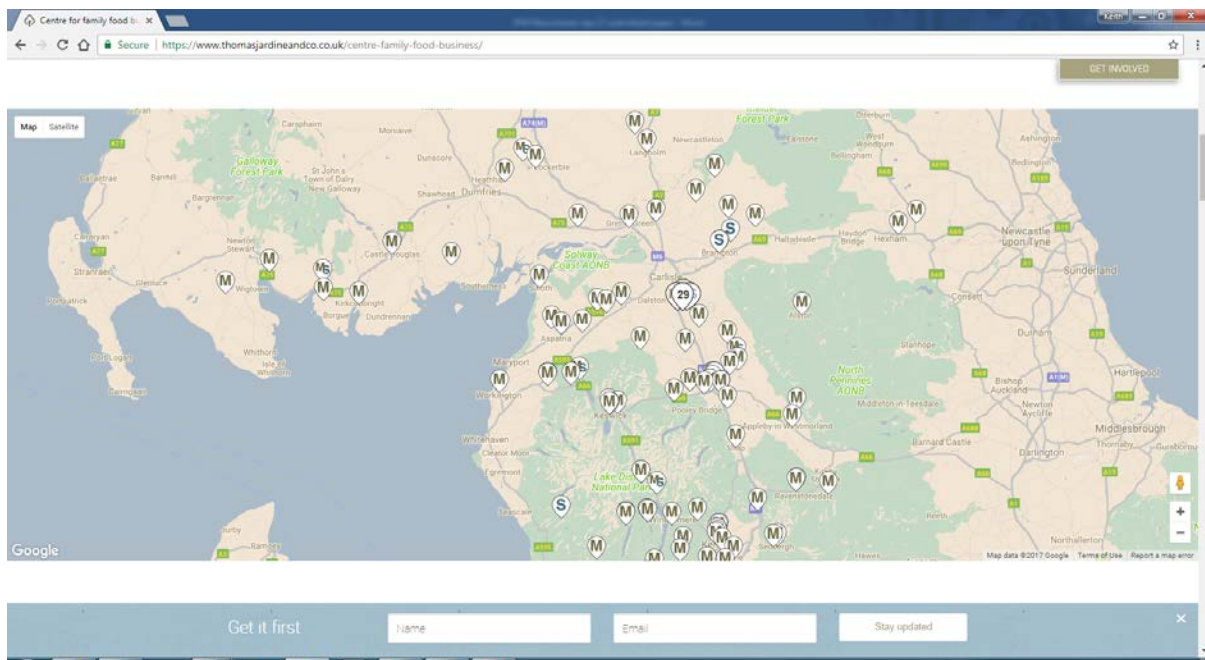Jardine & Co to its current interactive format available at https://www.thomasjardineandco.co.uk/centre-family-food-business/

Figure 1 Screen shot of current food map

The food map was part of a collaborative research project between Jardine Jackson Associate's (now Thomas Jardine & Co) and Carlisle Food City which looked to identify the key issues in the local food supply chain. The work included interviews with key local stakeholders (local food producers, wholesalers, retailers, cafes, bars and restaurants) and leaders of local food movements from across England. An online questionnaire (developed with and supported by Carlisle City Council) to food businesses based within the limits of the City Council area (this included food producers, retailers, cafes and restaurants), and surveys of shoppers in Carlisle City Centre. The results of this research led to the conclusion that food buyers focused on the price, availability, visibility and suitability of the local food on offer. The main issue identified (in this part of the research) for buyers looking to purchase local food was a lack of awareness of the local food available. The main issue for food producers was a lack of understanding of how to make their product suitable for the needs of the potential local buyer. (A copy of the findings of this initial research is available and we would be happy to talk to academia on how we could collaborate to get this work published in an academic journal).

This initial research, which was conducted without charge, led to funding via HEIF from the University of Cumbria and a contribution from the City of Carlisle. The second phase of the research allowed time to attend various meetings across the UK to identify ways in which the gap between local food producer and local food buyer could be strengthened. The outputs of this part of the research included further interviews with key local stakeholders (including local MP's; Carlisle College; Made in Cumbria; Carlisle Ambassadors; Cumberland News Group; Armstrong Watson Accountants and more local food producers, buyers and food specialists); national stakeholders

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[1] CPFRE (2012) From field to fork: The value of England's local food webs see
http://www.cpre.org.uk/resources/farming-and-food/local-foods/item/2897-from-field-to-fork

(including Guild of Fine Foods, IPM, ISBE and Birmingham City University), and a series of events to encourage the agenda around food, business and place (including presentations in Carlisle by IPM and Totally Locally). The findings of this research is available and again we would be happy to collaborate with academia to see this research jointly published in a relevant journal. The main issue this research highlighted was the need to raise the visibility of local food producers and this led to a series of discussions with key stakeholders to look at the feasibility of a local food show.

At the end of the HEIF 2016 funding we created a MoU between the University of Cumbria, City of Carlisle and Ivention (a local event company) with the intention of running a food event to celebrate local food in Carlisle in 2017.

With a great deal of support from Carlisle College, Pioneer Food Services, DG Food (food sector support body for Dumfries and Galloway) and H&H Auctions and with generous sponsorship from various national and local food businesses we were able to deliver a food show and a food dinner celebrating the wide variety of local food available. The food show attracted 40 stands (including a significant cohort of local Scottish based food producers), a great deal of media attention and some positive leads for the food businesses. The dinner brought together key local and regional stakeholders as well as the new head of the Sustainable Food Cities network. As a true celebration of local food the dinner was based entirely on local food, prepared under supervision by local college students and also included the presentation of a film on the activities of Food Carlisle which had been produced entirely by local students.

Figure 2 Shot of Local Food Show

The idea of the Carlisle project is not to create a place brand based on the food sector similar to the 'Dutch Food Valley' (Boisen et al, 2011), but more to celebrate a local food network by building on the work of CFRE [1] [2] and to strengthen that network in a way that reflects the support offered to Wisconsin by the Minnesota Institute of Sustainable Agriculture (MISA). [3

Key findings from the research suggest that the definition of local food is dependent on the individuals' perception and so any place branding using the term "local food" has to be broad enough to match the views of a variety of stakeholders. The successful support of the local food supply chain by local food producers depends on their ability to create products that are both visible, suitable and available for businesses who want to purchase them. The final point which is probably key to those involved in place making is that the success of the local food supply chain can only be sustainable if those coordinating the supply chain have a financial interest in the success of that chain. If the coordination is left to an actor who is funded externally from the supply chain,

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[2]CPFRE (2012) "From field to fork: The value of England's local food web" see
http://www.cpre.org.uk/resources/farming-and-food/local-foods/item/2897-from-field-to-fork
[3] See https://www.misa.umn.edu/

then this coordination, (no matter how well intended it is), will only be sustained as long as the external funding is available. This implies that food businesses act as the guardians of the local food taste that helps define our sense of place and that long established (often generational) food businesses are well-placed to act as the coordinators of a sustainable local food sector and key actors for community and local economic success.

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