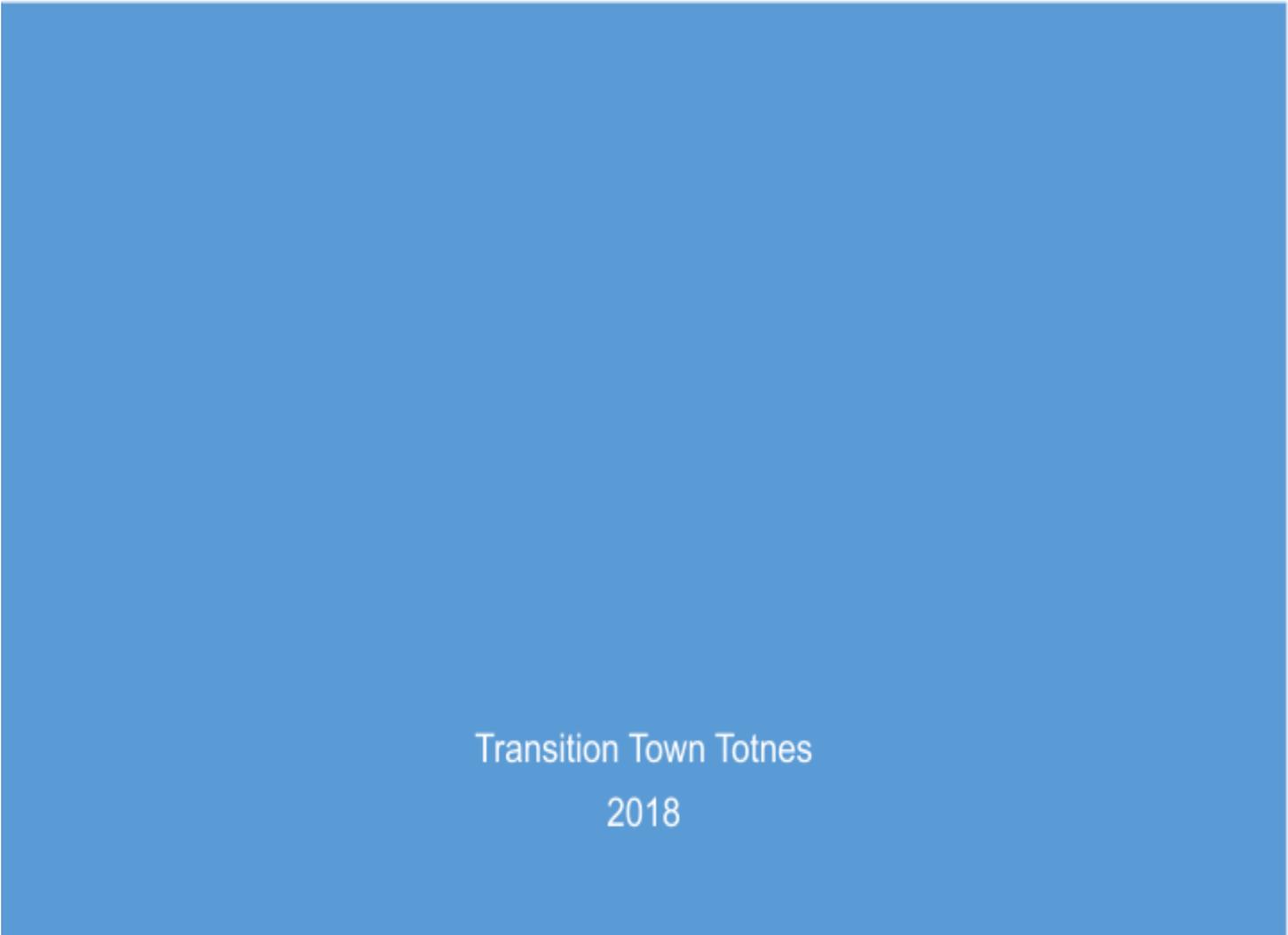




# LOCAL FOOD LOCAL SCHOOLS



Transition Town Totnes  
2018



**LOCAL FOOD LOCAL SCHOOLS:**  
**A pilot study into the opportunities and challenges  
of local food procurement in schools**

Produced by Jenny Gellatly and Myrtle Cooper  
as part of Transition Town Totnes' Totnes10 Campaign

Thank you to all those who took part in this study and to all of the  
procurement managers and cooks who work tirelessly to provide good  
food for our children under challenging circumstances

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## Introduction

The aim of this pilot study was to develop a simple survey methodology that would enable a better understanding of food procurement in schools in Totnes and Dartington. In particular we wanted the survey to capture information about where food is currently sourced, what the limitations may be in terms of what can be purchased and whether there was interest and opportunity to source more local food or what the barriers to this might be. This report brings together the findings of the pilot and makes recommendations for future research and action.

## Background

Food provenance is becoming more important as we recognise the fragility of the existing food system and the detrimental social and environmental impacts that surround national and global food supply chains. Transition Town Totnes (TTT)<sup>1</sup> seeks to find positive ways to strengthen our local food economy, to support the production of healthy food in our local area, to celebrate local food projects and businesses, to improve access to local food and to nurture links between consumer and local producer. Recent TTT food related projects include Grown in Totnes, Totnes 10 and Incredible Edible.

This research forms part of the Totnes 10 project, which started in 2015 with two main aims:

- To bring together local farmers, food processors and retailers to strengthen local food business connections and create a stronger enabling environment for local food to be traded in our community.
- To encourage people in and around Totnes to shift a small proportion of their weekly food spend to local independent food shops and products.

## Research process

We chose to focus this research on schools in Totnes and Dartington, with a view to potentially extending the research beyond Totnes and Dartington after this initial pilot study. Only one participating school fell outside of this study area and is situated in a village close to Totnes. We developed a questionnaire, which was completed either in person or online with participating schools. In addition to this primary research, secondary research was carried out in order to identify examples of how schools have been able to access more local food in other parts of the UK, some examples of which feature in this report.

It's important to note that due to the small sample size (5 in total) caution should be taken in extrapolating the results across schools in this area and further research is needed. Part of the purpose of this study was to develop and analyse the research tools themselves so as they could be used for more in depth work of this kind in the future.<sup>2</sup>

For the purposes of this study, we define local food as raw or processed food where the main ingredient is grown or produced within 30 miles of the school. This is the definition used across TTT's work and also by a large number of other organisations operating in this field of work in the UK.

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<sup>1</sup> Transition Town Totnes is a community-led and run local charity that exists to strengthen the local economy, reduce our environmental impact, and build our resilience for a future with less cheap energy and a changing climate.

<sup>2</sup> Notes about the research tool including potential additional questions and extensions to the research are made under recommendations and in appendix A

## Research findings

### Food and drink procurement in schools

Large scale regional or national wholesalers supplied the majority of food and drink to schools. One school was using one of the big four supermarkets to supply the bulk of their food and drink and a further school was considering shifting to buying from a supermarket. In a couple of instances schools had outsourced their catering to national companies.

The most commonly cited considerations when choosing which food and drink to buy and where to buy it from were cost and convenience - factors such as ease of ordering, regularity of delivery, and ease of preparing and portioning the food.

*'They deliver at 7am every day. They use the correct labelling e.g. allergens etc. The cook can order everything all in one go and it's delivered daily. We don't have storage space to store the food, which we would need if it were delivered less regularly.'*

*'The cook can pick up the phone and order whatever they need. Having lots of different suppliers requires more time.'*

### Challenges facing schools

Government cuts to school budgets are presenting major challenges for schools<sup>3</sup>. One school reported, how in the last 6 years, due to government cuts, they have had to cut their spending on school meals from £1.20 to around 78p per child.

*'The situation is going in the wrong direction, getting worse not better. A few years ago we were doing more, we saw potential for improvement, now we're just trying to maintain the standards we have and not let them drop.'*

Budget cuts affect the canteen experience schools are able to offer, the food and drink they're able to buy and the wages and staffing they can afford, and present schools with very difficult decisions around where to make cuts.

### Barriers to buying locally produced food

*'You'd have to replicate the convenience of frozen food, the convenience of ordering and delivering from one caterer, of daily deliveries. And cost.'*

Buying local often means dealing with many smaller suppliers and small orders, which requires more time. Schools don't necessarily have the facilities, the time or the skill to store, portion or prepare fresh food, meaning a certain amount of processing is needed before delivering to the school. In addition, local suppliers may not necessarily be able to deliver with the consistency, frequency or at the times needed by the schools, or in the quantities required by the mass catering companies.

*'The cook prefers to buy butter from [wholesaler] because it's just one order and it comes ready portioned, whereas butter from [local supplier] needs preparing.'*

<sup>3</sup> [www.schoolcuts.org.uk/#!](http://www.schoolcuts.org.uk/#!) : search tool to see how much schools in your community stand to lose as a result of government cuts

Where schools have outsourced their catering to large catering companies, they have limited ability to take advantage of opportunities to source locally, 'not allowed' being the response of one participant when asked what might make it easier for them to use more local produce. Schools instead choose from the caterers list of approved suppliers.

### Opportunities for increasingly procurement of local food

*'We would always want to use local produce where possible.'*

*'We would have liked to have done Food for Life<sup>4</sup> in the past, before budget cuts.'*

*'It's not that we're necessarily seeking [local suppliers] out. It's more a case of being awake to opportunity.'*

*'I would hope that most of the fruit and veg is local'*

There are clearly some big challenges to address if schools are to source more of their food and drink from local producers and no immediate opportunities to increase purchasing of local food were identified by participating schools. Yet despite the challenges, two participating schools were already sourcing some local food and drink directly from local suppliers and distributors and all schools showed an interest in and desire to buy more local produce, if other constraints could be overcome.

The main reason cited by all schools for wanting to buy local produce was to support local farmers and growers. One participant also explained that they bought local produce because they wanted their school to support and be part of the local community and for the children to gain some understanding of that through seeing the local food deliveries and having conversations about where that food had come from.

One participant commented that it wasn't so much that they were actively looking for local suppliers but that it was 'more a case of being awake to opportunity.' One school had found a local meat producer who had been willing to match the mass catering prices of their wholesaler and there were a number of items that some of the participating schools weren't currently buying locally but would like to source from local producers, such as bread, fish, flour and eggs.

Some of the schools were also taking a number of other initiatives in relation to food, such as reduction in use of sugar and education for parents about its negative effects, enabling children to watch and chat with the cook whilst they prepared the food, contracting in services to improve catering facilities, improving the canteen experience to make it as pleasant and nurturing as possible, and one school operated a fully pescatarian menu.

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<sup>4</sup> Food for Life is a Soil Association programme that 'brings schools, nurseries, hospitals and care homes, and their surrounding communities together around the core ethos of healthy, tasty and sustainable food.'  
[www.foodforlife.org.uk](http://www.foodforlife.org.uk)

### Learning by example

In other areas of the country, a number of approaches are being used to encourage more local food procurement in schools. Small scale local producers and other sustainable food businesses are accessing large scale procurement markets via cooperative marketing and supply initiatives, enabling them to supply in the quantities and with the frequency demanded by these contracts. Small, local catering companies have been set up to address barriers such as cost, lack of facilities and time, and are supplying school meals using fresh local ingredients.

#### Case study: Manchester Veg People

'Manchester Veg People is a pioneering co-operative of local organic growers, buyers (restaurants/cafes, caterers and public sector), and workers – collaborating to provide fresh seasonal food of the highest possible quality for Greater Manchester.

Manchester Veg People is different from a wholesaler in that growers work with the buyers to plan their crops according to demand. So produce is grown especially for the buyers, and it is harvested to order – which means it's much fresher than produce that has been in transit and in storage for a number of days. It also provides a more stable way of working for the growers, who know they have a market for their produce, and will be paid fairly for it.'

Manchester Veg People work with a number of large public sector organisations across Greater Manchester including University of Manchester, Oldham Schools, Central Manchester NHS Trust and Manchester City Council.

[www.kindling.org.uk/projects/manchester-veg-people](http://www.kindling.org.uk/projects/manchester-veg-people)

[www.vegpeople.org.uk](http://www.vegpeople.org.uk)

#### Case study: Local Food Links

Local Food Links was established in 1999 by the West Dorset Food and Land Trust, a registered charity and local community organisation, to run Farmer's Markets and other food initiatives.

'We established a hot meals service for schools and nurseries operating from our newly established Centre for Local Food. This was a major evolution in school meal catering, which today is dominated by industrial scale caterers that supply schools across the UK. Local Food Links now focuses mainly on our school meals service. Our kitchens in Bridport and Blandford provide freshly prepared meals daily to over 30 schools and nurseries. We also run mini-hub kitchens in Dorchester Middle School and Shillingstone School and they supply eight other schools between them.'

[www.localfoodlinks.org.uk](http://www.localfoodlinks.org.uk)

## Conclusion

Shifting more of a school's annual spend on food and drink to local producers could help support local farmers and growers and the local economy, as well as having potential health benefits through fresher food. Budgetary and resources constraints mean that seeking out opportunities to buy more local produce isn't necessarily possible or a priority for schools. Where schools are tied into large catering contracts, it would be a matter of working directly with the catering company to determine options to increase local food supply. Where schools maintain flexibility in terms of who they buy from, ways of overcoming obstacles to buying local produce would need to be found without putting increased pressure on already overstretched staff and resources.

## Recommendations

Taking inspiration from work happening elsewhere in the UK, we outline a number of possible steps that could be taken to build upon this initial pilot study and to address some of the challenges and opportunities highlighted through the research:

- Celebrate what schools are already doing around food and find ways to support them to continue
- Identify ways to support those already supplying local food to schools in order to continue and expand the work they are doing, such as Food in Community<sup>5</sup>
- Facilitate sharing of information between schools about which local food suppliers they use in order to enable uptake of that supplier by other schools.
- Identify further local food suppliers who may be able to meet the needs of schools, such as the local meat supplier who was able to match mass catering prices. Work could potentially be done with a single school to identify local food suppliers that could meet their needs. This could then act as a case study for further work with other schools.
- Expand this existing research to include a larger number of local schools, as well as other anchor institutions such as hospitals, care homes and care providers.
- Add an additional step to the existing research in order to fully explore the supply chain for products supplied to schools and other institutions.
- Facilitate networking and dialogue between school staff, parents, caterers and local producers to form connections and co-design solutions together.
- Carry out further detailed research into the ways in which the challenges and barriers to supplying local food to schools and other institutions have been overcome in other parts of the UK, including investigating where small scale local producers and other sustainable food businesses are accessing large scale procurement markets via cooperative marketing and supply initiatives. This research

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<sup>5</sup> Food in Community (FiC) 'collect surplus organic or locally grown fruit and vegetables that would otherwise go to waste, and deliver it to groups and organisations that feed children, young people, vulnerable adults and community groups' [www.facebook.com/FoodinCommunityCIC](http://www.facebook.com/FoodinCommunityCIC)

could include Manchester Veg People, Brighton and Hove Food Partnership, Local Food Links, School Food Company, Food Plymouth CIC to name a few.<sup>6</sup>

- Carry out a feasibility study to determine whether a similar model to the Local Food Links hot meals service in Dorset could be established for schools and other local institutions.
- Establish an effective cross-sector food partnership to co-design and deliver an effective food strategy for the local area that seeks to address challenges and barriers faced by schools and other local institutions in accessing local food.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Further examples can be found at [www.sustainablefoodcities.org/keyissues/transformingcateringandfoodprocurement/cityinitiatives](http://www.sustainablefoodcities.org/keyissues/transformingcateringandfoodprocurement/cityinitiatives)

<sup>7</sup> More information and advice on forming a food partnership : [www.sustainablefoodcities.org/getstarted/gettingthebasicsright/settingupafoodpartnership](http://www.sustainablefoodcities.org/getstarted/gettingthebasicsright/settingupafoodpartnership)

## Bibliography & Bank of inspirational resources

[The school food plan](#) : published by the Department for Education in July 2013, it sets out seventeen actions to transform what children eat in schools and how they learn about food.

[Factors influencing take-up of free school meals in primary- and secondary-school children in England](#) : academic paper published by Public Health Nutrition in 2013

[Brighton and Hove Food Partnership](#) [www.bhfood.org.uk](http://www.bhfood.org.uk) : a not for profit organisation helping people to learn to cook, eat a healthy diet, grow their own food and waste less food (in particular their work on influencing policy [www.bhfood.org.uk/influencing-policy](http://www.bhfood.org.uk/influencing-policy))

[Soil Association Food for Life programme](#) : Food for Life brings schools, nurseries, hospitals and care homes, and their surrounding communities together around the core ethos of healthy, tasty and sustainable food

[Food for Life Served Here Standards Handbook](#) for hospitals, early years, schools, residential care, further and higher education, workplaces, cafes and events.

[What's powering your kids?](#) : Search tool to find out which schools are part of the Food for Life programme

[Sustainable Food Cities](#) : The Sustainable Food Cities approach involves developing a cross-sector partnership of local public agencies, businesses, academics and NGOs committed to working together to make healthy and sustainable food a defining characteristic of where they live.

- [People's Food Policy](#)
- [Setting up a Governance Body](#)
- [Getting started as a Sustainable Food City](#)
- [How to set up an urban food strategy and Developing a Food Plan](#)
- [Measuring progress](#)
- [Existing Food Strategies and Action Plans](#)
- [Devon Food Strategy](#)
- [Food Plymouth Action Plan](#)
- [Guide to transforming food procurement](#)
- [Practical examples of how places are transforming food procurement](#)

[Manchester Veg People](#) : a pioneering co-operative of local organic growers, buyers (restaurants/cafes, caterers and public sector), and workers – collaborating to provide fresh seasonal food of the highest possible quality for Greater Manchester.

[Food Plymouth CIC](#): Food Plymouth is a city-wide, cross-sector partnership of organizations and businesses working to support Plymouth's journey to be a 'Sustainable Food City'. It is led by the three main public sector bodies in the city: Plymouth City Council, Plymouth Community Healthcare, Plymouth University and is coordinated by the Soil Association; working to promote sustainable and healthy food as a powerful driver for promoting and enabling positive social, economic and environmental change.

[Local Food Links](#) : Local Food Links run a school meals service providing freshly prepared meals daily to over 30 schools and nurseries.

[Local Food Links: The first 10 years](#) : A review of the development of Local Food Links by Tim Crabtree, its former director and one of the founders of the Bridport Centre for Local Food. The report charts the

development of a social enterprise from the trading arm of a charity to an independent organisation focused on providing nutritious school meals made with local food.

[School Food Company](#) : delivering local produce into the kitchens of primary schools in Cheshire.

[ISS Facilities Education](#) delivering nutritious and sustainably produced meals to schools in Richmond.

[School lunch take up survey](#) : feasibility study looking at what information schools in England hold on pupil take-up of school meals.

[Fish and Kids](#) : a Marine Stewardship Council project designed to bring sustainable seafood sourcing to schools.

[School Cuts](#) : search tool to see how much schools in your community stand to lose as a result of government cuts

[3663 : The food company that ate Britain](#) : article from the Independent about 3663, the food company that supplies a quarter of Britain's catering needs

[Transition Town Totnes](#) : community-led and run local charity that exists to strengthen the local economy, reduce our environmental impact, and build our resilience for a future with less cheap energy and a changing climate.

[Totnes10](#) : A Transition Town Totnes project that ran between 2015 and 2019 with two main aims: to bring together local farmers, food processors and retailers to strengthen local food business connections and create a stronger enabling environment for local food to be traded in our community; to encourage people in and around Totnes to shift a small proportion of their weekly food spend to local independent food shops and products.

[Food in Community](#) : collect surplus organic or locally grown fruit and vegetables from Totnes and surrounds that would otherwise go to waste, and deliver it to groups and organisations that feed children, young people, vulnerable adults and community groups.



## Appendices

### Appendix A: Analysis of the research tool

The questionnaire developed for this study proved a useful tool for building relationships and coming to understand existing practice within schools. Responses were particularly rich where interviews were carried out in person, whereas many of the nuances were lost when the questionnaire was completed by participants online.

Potential additional questions could have included: questions in relation to where responsibility for procurement and catering lay and whether these were outsourced or not; whether there were the facilities within the schools for storing and preparing meals from scratch. In addition, it would have been helpful to carry out research into the supply chain for individual products, as in some cases, where a product was being bought from a retailer or wholesaler and assumed to be local, it wasn't possible to be 100% sure that it met the definition of local food used for this project without tracing it's origin.

It's important to note that due to the small sample size (5 in total) caution should be taken in extrapolating the results across schools in this area and further research is needed. Part of the purpose of this study was to develop and analyse the research tools themselves so as they could be used for more in depth work of this kind in the future.

## Appendix B: The questionnaire

# School Meals Questionnaire

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## Introduction

Transition Town Totnes is conducting a small piece of research aimed at gaining a better understanding of food procurement at local schools in and around Totnes - how procurement works, where food tends to come from and what the constraints may be in terms of what you can or can't purchase. We're also wanting to understand whether there is interest and opportunity to source more local food or what the barriers might be to this.

We've put together a series of questions to find out more about this. We'd be really grateful if you could respond to as many of the questions as you are able to. The information collected from all of the different schools will be amalgamated and written into a short report or summary. Commercially sensitive information will be kept strictly confidential. Information will be kept anonymous and presented as totals or aggregate figures and not linked to specific schools. Case studies may be written but only with the specific agreement and further consent of the school.

If you have any questions please get in touch: [jenny@transitiontowntotnes.org](mailto:jenny@transitiontowntotnes.org)

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## Your Contact Information

**Date:**

**Name of organisation being interviewed:**

**Type of organisation (e.g. primary school):**

**Contact person + role:**

**Phone:**

**Email:**

**Website:**

**When's a good time to contact you?**



## Food Spend

*In this section we're aiming to understand how much is spent on food and drink by local schools and what the uptake of school meals is overall.*

1. What is your estimated annual spend on food and drink?
2. What is the average cost of a school meal at your school?
  - a. for the school
  - b. for the parent or guardian
1. What proportion of children at your school choose school meals?
1. How many meals per day does that equate to on average?

## Food Suppliers

*In this section we're aiming to understand more about what the main considerations are for you when choosing your suppliers and who you tend to source from.*

1. Who are your main suppliers of food and drink?

Type of produce	Supplier's name + location	What type of business are they e.g. wholesaler, producer, retailer

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1. How does a business become a supplier of food and drink to your organisation?

Here, we are interested in finding out:

- What food services are contracted out?
- How are these food services put out for tender?
- What's the minimum spend?
- What's the contract length and size?
- How are contracts evaluated?
- Who's responsible for decision making?

1. When sourcing food and drink, what are the main things you take into account in order to decide what you will source and where you will source from?

## Local Food

In this section we're aiming to understand more about barriers and opportunities when it comes to sourcing locally produced food.

1. What is your definition of local food?

1. What is your estimated annual spend on food and drink produced in the local area (within a 30 mile radius)? For the purposes of this study, we're defining local food as raw or processed food where the main ingredient is grown or produced within 30 miles of the school.

**If you:**

- **do not use local produce, please go to question 10**
- **use local produce, please go to question 15**

**If you do not use local food**

*In this section we're interested in understanding barriers and opportunities to sourcing local food.*

1. What are the main barriers you face in using local produce?

Please tick any/all that apply and/or add additional barriers under 'other':

- Cost
- Finding suppliers of local produce
- Sourcing sufficient quantity
- Quality of local produce
- Cooking with local produce
- Other (please specify).....

1. Are there any opportunities you see for using local produce and, if so, what are they?

1. Are there any products you would like to source locally and, if so, what are they?  
Please list.

1. What would make it easier for you to use more local produce?

Please tick any/all that apply and/or add additional ideas under 'other':

- Local food wholesale service supplying the raw ingredients
- Local food wholesale service supplying ready prepared meals
- Training in cooking with local produce
- Support finding local suppliers
- Wider range of local produce available
- Other (please specify).....

1. Are there any other initiatives you're taking in relation to food at your school and, if so, what are they? (e.g. health, free range, food waste, growing, cooking classes etc)

***If you use local produce***

*In this section we're interested in understanding barriers and opportunities to using local food (you do not need to complete this section if you do not use local produce)*

15) What local produce do you use and where does it come from?

Type of produce	Supplier's name + location	What type of business are they e.g. wholesaler, producer, retailer?



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16) What are your main reasons for using local produce?

Please tick all/any that apply and/or add additional reasons under 'other':

- Price
- Supporting local farmers and growers
- Taste and freshness
- Health
- Quality of local produce
- Other (please specify).....

1. What are the main barriers to using more local produce?

Please tick any/all that apply and/or add additional barriers under 'other':

- Cost
- Finding suppliers of local produce
- Sourcing sufficient quantity
- Quality of local produce
- Cooking with local produce
- Other (please specify).....

1. What opportunities do you see for increasing the amount of local produce you use?

1. What would make it easier for you to use more local produce?

Please tick any/all that apply and/or add additional ideas under 'other':

- Local food wholesale service supplying the raw ingredients
- Local food wholesale service supplying ready prepared meals
- Training in cooking with local produce
- Support finding local suppliers



- Wider range of produce available locally
- Other (please specify).....

1. Are there any other products you would like to source locally and, if so, what are they? Please list.

1. Are you taking any other initiatives in relation to food at your school and, if so, what are they? (e.g. health, free range, food waste, growing or cooking classes etc).

**Many thanks for completing this questionnaire. Please email your responses or any questions to [info@transitiontowntotnes.org](mailto:info@transitiontowntotnes.org)**

