

Virtual Farmers Market

Project Summary (500 words)

The food we eat makes a significant contribution to climate change, accounting for 31% of our greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (EU 2007). Emissions occur at all stages of the food chain including agricultural production, manufacturing, refrigeration, transport, packaging, retail, home storage, cooking and waste disposal. If we are to stand a realistic chance of preventing runaway global warming, it is time to rethink our agricultural systems.

This project seeks to go beyond the popular concept of “food miles” to consider the complete life-cycle of food – from field to plate. A sustainable local food system will address the above sources of emissions by engaging the communities of the Bristol city-region, from the farmers and allotment associations, to the consumer, to local government, academics and community groups. The project will endeavour to make an exemplar food system that can be replicated across the UK to make a significant contribution to reducing the UK’s GHG emissions.

Organic, sustainable and/or locally grown foods, and knowing where your food originates, continue to grow in popularity. The public’s appetite for locally produced food has grown rapidly; in the second half of 2007 alone, consumers actively trying to buy local food increased from 48% to 57% (Nielson 2007). The switch in demand to locally sourced food has been demonstrated by the growth in farmers’ markets, and Bristol City Council (BCC), like many others, now supports lively local farmers’ markets. Bristol also hosts many allotment associations who produce significant quantities of fruit and vegetables annually.

Despite their success, farmers’ markets struggle to meet the demand for local food due to the shopping habits of most British citizens being based on convenience. Allotments generally only benefit their owners and their friends and family.

The Virtual Farmers’ Market (VFM) aims to facilitate the distribution of local food and drink from producers and allotment owners to communities in Bristol, reducing emissions at every stage of the food chain. VFM will offer communities an easy way to order, online, the exact food and drink they want and have delivered to their doorstep. Suppliers will benefit from a wide marketing campaign, combined distribution and storage network and financing of biofuel delivery vehicles (from potential partners Ford). Increasingly, consumers want their food to be local, organic, animal friendly and/or fairtrade. The VFM will meet these demands by providing the gold standard in sustainable local food production.

VFM will increase Bristol’s capacity to grow food within its urban area. This will be achieved by creating a market, and thus an economic incentive, for fruit and vegetables grown in people’s gardens. Communities will be given the

ability to contribute produce to VFM by participating in training courses and through the provision of subsidised fruit trees and seeds. For those unable or unwilling to grow food, there will be opportunities to 'sponsor a veg' patch', where someone else manages a vegetable patch but which you host in your garden and benefit from the harvest.