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Northern
Ireland Year of Food
& Drink 2016

Year of Food & Drink Main Course

May – August 2016

#EnjoyNI16



We
Craft

We
Catch

We
Cook

We
Breed

We
Grow

We
Enjoy

Main course of Year of Food and Drink

New events, innovative products, start-up food tours and burgeoning relationships are just some of the 'culinary creations' served up so far as part of the NI Year of Food and Drink.

The Tourism NI (TNI) initiative designed to place food and drink at the very heart of the visitor experience has engaged and inspired throughout its first eight months and continues to gather momentum moving towards its final third.

In the meantime, however, as we sit down to this Main Course brochure we can do little else but pay our highest complements to the chefs. And not just the chefs but the local authorities, business owners, hospitality staff and event programmers who have drank deep of the opportunities offered by the scheme.

Focussing on the months from May to August – in the second of three brochures paying tribute to industry activity - we detail a dizzying range of engagement and support. And perhaps most importantly we look at the collaborations, the relationships and partnerships that have created this stage.

We examine some of the outcomes of the Year of Food and Drink Tourism Events Scheme, a £300,000 fund secured from central government. Designed to enhance and uplift both new and existing events, we speak to just a handful of its 48 funding recipients. From the brand new Veg Stock as part of the Cathedral Arts Quarter Festival to a 'Meat and Greet' event at Féile an Phobail, the fund has boosted both visitor numbers and ticket sales.

Councils too have taken the lead, in public and private partnerships, with Armagh's 'Food Heartland' strategy just one shining example. And with targeted WorldHost training and supported display stands, TNI maintains its ongoing support. Research into the business benefits being reaped so far produced outstanding results back in May and with the final months to come, the work goes on.

Our Republic of Ireland (RoI) office too, has put the initiative firmly in the frame with a host of profile-boosting activity. Two dedicated TV programmes on RTÉ generated over €3 million in weighted PR value while a funded programme, 'Northern Feast' will air this Autumn. Magazine features, press trips and events have seen a whole host of coverage secured across the south while our bespoke campaign in the RoI at present aims to drive visits from that market in this special foodie year.

With October's Harvest month upon us there's still time to gather the bounties of this hugely successful initiative and Tourism NI will continue the journey beyond this landmark year. With initiatives and insights aimed at securing our place at the global food table of the future we will ensure the momentum, energy, skills and passion demonstrated this year are carried with us as part of its lasting legacy.

All the articles included in this brochure can be accessed on the News & Media section of the Tourism NI industry website.

Visit www.tourismni.com

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Tourism Events Scheme steps up to the plate for Year of Food and Drink

Financial support from Tourism NI provides a lifeline to a host of events whether global happenings such as the Giro d'Italia, international events like the NI Open or national levels events like Georgian Day. However, this year has seen a further lift with the allocation of additional support as part of the Northern Ireland Year of Food and Drink 2016.

A total of 48 events were successful in application and are being supported from a £300,000 Year of Food and Drink Tourism Events Scheme secured from central government for the 12-month long initiative. Allocation of the budget, designed to enhance and uplift the food and drink element of existing events or create a new authentic food and drink experience at new events, was finalised in May by TNI's events team. With awards ranging in value from £3,000 to £10,000, recipients included Shane's Castle Vintage Steam Fair, a Bluegrass Festival in Omagh, a brand new addition to the Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival, and a 'Meat and Greet' at the Féile International Food Fayre.

Operated under a similar format to Tourism NI's existing National Tourism Events Sponsorship Scheme, recipients applied via an open call process and submitted applications demonstrating how the event aligned to a number of key requirements. The aim of the sponsorship was to support the YoFaD overall and included: enhancing the reputation of local food and drink; celebrating food and drink culture; enhancing and reviving the food offering at existing events and ensuring the creation of new and authentic experiences.

"This has been put into practice in a number of ways," said Eddie Rowan, Events Manager with Tourism NI. "For example with the Apple Blossom Festival in Armagh. This is an annual event which normally happens anyway and celebrates the PGI of the Bramley Apple. However, with sponsorship from the YoFaD Tourism Events Scheme, it will ultimately further enhance the visitor journey at the event by adding in food tours and a range of new tasting experiences."

A brand new event 'Veg Stock', also supported by the Scheme, saw the Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival create Ireland's first meat-free festival at the start of May. The one-day event showcased high quality, local food and drink having also "beefed up proceedings" with a full line-up of live music.



"Veg Stock is a great example of what this sponsorship can achieve as the Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival hadn't included a food element before. However, it has also provided an opportunity for lesser known events to come to our attention and receive support."



The brand new 'Veg Stock' event at the Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival is one of 48 being supported by the Year of Food and Drink Tourism Events Scheme

Amongst the eligibility parameters was total visitor numbers of over 1000 and a minimum income and expenditure of £30,000 (prior to receiving monies from TNI). This was reduced from the usual £50,000 mark of the National Tourism Events Sponsorship Scheme.

"The first questions presented to applicants were in relation to the Year of Food and Drink itself as to what exactly they were going to do to underpin its message," continued Eddie. "We also required a demonstration of how the monthly themes would be linked in, how local and seasonal produce would be used, lists of local producers supplying the event and how those collaborations would forge new relationships in the future."

"Part of the requirements of the sponsorship scheme", continued Eddie, "is how recipients will promote the YoFaD, a factor which was closely examined when scoring applications."



"Typically in the Tourism Event Sponsorship Scheme we ask how Tourism NI and Discover NI could be promoted through the event marketing channels and this is broken down into print, paid advertising, PR and online marketing. In terms of the YoFaD the applicant was asked to highlight what opportunities they can give NI YoFaD within the marketing of their event."

The process doesn't end there however as each event is attended by a Tourism NI representative, who looks forward to experiencing the event and witness the YoFaD event come to life. "As we couldn't possibly see everything at the event, there's a post-event evaluation whereby applicants get the opportunity to report on their event and prove how they have met the agreed conditions. Payments are then made after the event has taken place and all post event items completed."

"We have a busy year and the team look forward to working with all the event organisers throughout Northern Ireland to deliver an authentic NI Year of Food and Drink event experiences to remember."



Photography: Bernadette McAllister



Landscape and Place bears fruit for County Down cottage

With Landscape and Places in the spotlight during May, TourismNI.com looked at how the landscape of County Down was bearing fruit for a 19th century cottage which has been providing self-catering accommodation since its renovation ten years ago.

Glassdrumman Cottage in Saintfield is run by William Howard who planted an orchard beside the traditional farm building during its conversion in 2006.



Originally intended as a landscaping feature so guests could enjoy the apple blossom, Glassdrumman now produces its very own cider savoured by visitors and locals alike. Currently in its third year of production, albeit on a tiny scale, the cider is a direct result of the landscape as well as the 'place', as accommodation provider and cider producer William explained.

"The idea to make cider came a few years after the renovation when I needed to find something to do with all the apples. The first cider was an experiment to test if there was a drinkable product with the idea just to use it for people staying in the cottage. However, it received such good reviews that I decided to make it available to friends and then locally in the Saintfield area here where we are based. This will be the third year of cider production, we produce approximately 1000 bottles, our production is very small scale and entirely seasonal."

William encloses his very own news sheet with each case of cider covering stories that he hopes will be of interest to customers. These range from food-matching pieces and seasonal recipes to the history of the orchard and the varieties it contains. He has also trialled a food and drink tour and is exploring the possibility of taster tours in the grounds of the whitewashed cottage, which is situated on top of a drumlin in County Down.

Situated around one mile outside Saintfield, the 'place' features prominently in William's marketing of the self-catering cottage.

"Most of the buildings along the main street were built in the 18th century and although the village now caters for a modern society the original architecture is still visible," explained William. "In terms of extending the Landscape and Places theme, we also have the National Trust's Rowallane Gardens located on the outskirts of the village and within 10 minutes' drive you can find golfing at Rockmount Golf Course, equestrian activities at Lessans Stables, and fishing at Carrickmannon Fishery."

The importance of Landscape and Place is also compounded in the many paintings adorning the cottage walls, over 70 in total. Most of the pictures are traditional in context and many have an Irish connection, either through the artist or subject, and help to set the mood within the cottage, he believes.

"Hopefully these pictures will help visitors get a sense of what Ireland is like and inspire them to maybe visit some of the locations and see the actual landscape for themselves."

Find out more about Glassdrumman Cottage and cider at irishcottageorent.com and glassdrummancider.com

TNI and St George's Market 'stand' up for destinations

An exciting opportunity for destinations to boost their reputations and promote their food offerings, was made available by Tourism NI in partnership with St George's Market.

A dedicated Year of Food and Drink platform has been provided to a range of stakeholders over the busy weekend periods at the iconic Belfast market throughout the year. Local councils, via their visitor information centres, as well as a number of food and drink producers, have already availed of this platform in a prominent site near the market clock. With almost 20,000 visitors from Friday to Sunday, the dedicated Year of Food and Drink stand provides a wonderful opportunity for key stakeholders to get involved.

Tourism NI's Director of Business Support and Events, Aine Kearney said the aim of the project was two-fold in supporting tourism.

"It is hoped that the project, like the Year of Food and Drink overall, can support the tourism agenda by building on NI's growing destination reputation as well as improving the visitor experience and supporting our wider agri-food objective to grow export food sales," she explained.

"The TNI stand provides our stakeholders with an opportunity to work to their strengths, whether that's talking about their destination, their produce, local restaurants or their food experiences within their region, so think about what you have going on and how best to promote it in St George's Market".



Mid Ulster visitor information staff member Geraldine Christie with Fluffy Meringue producers from the Mid Ulster region

During April and May, the stand hosted a number of regions including Mid Ulster, Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon; Newry Mourne and Down; Causeway Coast and Glens; Ards and North Down as well as Visit Belfast. Many wonderful producers such as Fluffy Meringues, Long Meadow Cider, NI Food Tours, Brighter Gold, North Coast Smokehouse and Neary Nogs Chocolates have also taken up the opportunity.

"Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Council had a great weekend, for example," said Aine. "They used their 'Food Heartland' brand which was really well received by the visitors, while their fabulous promotion of the PGI status 'Bramley Apple' provided an opportunity for the producers to talk directly to the consumer and provided a platform to distribute their Food Heartland Event Guide as well as a Bramley Apple cookbook. Their team commented that with so many 'foodies' attending the market every week, it's also a great chance for our businesses to get their product out into the market."

Aine concluded: "We will secure participation via our Year of Food and Drink Local Authority and Marketing & Communications Groups to maximise multiple destination profiles and will secure relevant producers through our strategic partner, Food NI and other industry collectives."

Exports and tourism taken to 'heart' by ABC Council

www.armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk/foodheartland



A landscape which can boast two out of our three EU protected foodstuffs has been taken to 'heart' by its corresponding council with the backing of the region's producers.

The Bramley apple and the Lough Neagh eel – both of which have Protected Geographical Indicator (PGI) status - are just part of the 'Food Heartland' focus which showcases Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon's thriving agri-food sector. Backed by over 200 producers, from global operators to specialist artisans, the council's innovative strategy has been shaped entirely by industry members. With a twofold aim of boosting sales as well as the area's reputation as a food destination, the Food Heartland strategy was launched last April and rebooted for the Year of Food and Drink.

The unique public and private sector partnership acknowledges the importance of the agri-food sector whilst working towards the council's main objective, explained its Economic Development Officer Sarah-Jane Macdonald.

"Growing the local economy is the council's number one priority and the message from the Food Heartland programme is that we are open for business. We're vibrant and outward looking with a strong international focus and an abundance of top quality producers right across the board. From Moy Park to Linwoods and Tayto, and lots of really special artisan producers, the strategy has been industry driven since its inception early last year."



L – R: Head of Economic Development Department, Nicola Wilson, Lord Mayor Cllr Darryn Causby, Kevin McCann of P. McCann & Sons and Sarah-Jane Macdonald, Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council

With the Forum's coordinators having met with a range of producers before the new council was formed in 2015, marketing consultants were then appointed to help develop a brand. The resulting 'Food Heartland' branding is being used for a number of programmes from the initial Food Heartland Forum to Food Heartland Awards. The heart symbol in the logo (see opposite page) represents both the lough and the land and is an image embraced by industry in much the same way as the overall plan.

"The Food Heartland Forum, which is funded by the DARD Regional Food Programme, is populated by producers who drive the forum forward," explained Sarah-Jane. "They come to us with ideas which we listen to and absorb before going back with an appropriate action plan. The idea was always to have a brand that truly belongs to the producers and they have all bought in behind it and are very proud of it overall."

And that buy-in has been spreading with chefs and restaurants getting involved in a spirit of collaboration and partnership which is crucial to the strategy's success.

"Working together on this strategy is vital, without that we don't have anything and more and more businesses are seeing the merit in pulling together. For example, an existing chefs' cluster has evolved into a Food Heartland cluster and it's the same with local restaurants who are picking up the brand. As part of our Food Heartland Awards for example we have craft cider makers who use the Bramley apple, working with chefs to smoke Lough Neagh eels in partnerships which are driving innovation and quality."



Cara Gribben and Ann Woods of Forest Feasts

The Food Heartland Awards, which took place in May, celebrate the borough's 'quality creators and passionate producers' and are an important strand in driving forward quality and reputation. Another function of the council in supporting forum members is in celebrating local produce at key events throughout the Year of Food and Drink and beyond.

"We are looking at the Year of Food and Drink as our 'golden opportunity'," explained Sarah-Jane. **"We don't see this as a one-off but as an ongoing plan with a legacy. We are promoting food tourism by using both brands at our biggest**

footfall events, such as Armagh City's Georgian Day. Under the umbrellas of both the Food Heartland and the Year of Food and Drink we drive home the message that our food and drink can show the region at its best. By doing this we are taking on the tourism mantle as well as driving exports."

In support of that objective the council has a year-long series of events planned right up to December when the Food Heartland producers will promote their wares at St George's Market. However, a range of other activity is also in the pipeline with the bottom line of the local economy remaining the top priority.

"We have a Food Heartland export support programme out to tender which will help our producers export to new markets," Sarah-Jane continued. **"We are also working on a Bramley apple supply chain project exploring how we can make the most of this wonderful product."**

"As part of our programme we have already facilitated a workshop with the food critic Charles Campion as well as the beer and food critic Pete Brown who pointed out just how unique our area is with all our cider producers using a PGI apple. We hear all the time that we don't shout enough about those unique selling points so we are using the Food Heartland and the Year of Food and Drink to do just that."

For more information on Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council's Food Heartland go to www.armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk/foodheartland



WorldHost trainees lauded at celebratory events



A celebratory event for successful participants of a Tourism NI Year of Food and Drink training programme took place in Belfast in May, hosted by a high profile food critic and attended by around 50 people.



Back row: Aine Kearney of Tourism NI and food critic Charles Campion with some of the successful WorldHost participants at the celebratory event in The Merchant in May

The WorldHost 'Sales Powered by Service' programme saw 80 industry professionals trained in customer service skills tailored specifically for the Year of Food and Drink and aimed ultimately at boosting businesses' bottom line. Over 30 of the programme's successful participants attended the celebratory lunch at The Merchant Hotel on Monday, 9 May to be presented with their certificates by Charles Campion. The leading food writer and critic addressed the gathering on the importance of food provenance and its added value to customer service, just one of the topics covered in the training.

Tourism NI Business Support director Aine Kearney opened the proceedings by reviewing the WorldHost programme before handing over to Mr Campion to make the presentations.

Tourism NI project manager and industry development officer Louise McKinstry said the event was a wonderful celebration of the trainees' commitment to the training which it was hoped would now be rolled out across the region.

"Along with our partners in Food NI and People 1st, we tailored one of our existing WorldHost training programmes in order to strengthen customer service by essentially bringing the knowledge of our local food and drink to life, so that it can be sold with passion and belief."

"With the support of the local councils on the Local Authority Group for Year of Food and Drink, we recruited 80 trainees to eight programmes across four locations throughout February and March."

"The feedback has been extremely positive, so much so that we have been reviewing these pilots with the local councils and are now working together to roll out further training opportunities in the coming months."

As well as the certificate presentations, attendees were treated to a finger buffet lunch of local produce with some lucky participants also winning a place on 'The Foodie's Food and Drink Tour of Belfast' run by Belfast Food Tours or NI Food Tours' 'Fab Tour of County Down'. Food hampers packed with local goods were also amongst the prizes on the day.



Some of the WorldHost trainees who were entered into the prize draw during the event then availed of their prize a few weeks later by taking part in the Belfast food tour.

The tour, which began at St George's Market before visiting The Garrick, Co Couture the John Hewitt and Coppi, focusses exclusively on premium local food and drink and the stories behind the people and the produce, key elements of the WorldHost training.

One of the participants in attendance, Karen Edwards, who runs the Channel Vista self-catering holiday let in Glenarm, said the added benefit of the tour would be in providing top quality recommendations to her guests.

"You want the people who stay on your premises to have a great food experience. I think from a self-catering point of view especially, seeing all the market has to offer, both from a tourist's and a shopper's perspective, was fabulous."

Karen, who provides a welcome pack for her guests, said the training had reaffirmed the importance of using local produce but had also highlighted its crucial part in the overall holiday experience for visitors.

"The WorldHost training was excellent, very useful and I was surprised at the standard and variety of the local produce we were introduced to. Since then, for example, I have been working exclusively with my local baker in Glenarm and other local suppliers and that is as a result of the programme."

Marie Byrne, who also runs a self-catering facility in Glenarm, Castle Glen House, said the wide range of local produce on the tour and the training had refocused her welcome pack offering to local visitors in addition to foreign guests.

"I would have concentrated on local produce more with foreign visitors but now do the same with locals," said Marie. "The tour really does show you the range of local produce from all over the north. The training made us more aware of local produce in general and I would have liked to have seen it brought even more local if possible, for example in Glenarm where we are based. However, I would definitely use more local products now."

Cultural heritage specialist Sharon Brown, who hosts international visitors as part of a tourism interaction programme, said the WorldHost training had helped her immensely with her guests who she described as 'very foodie'.

"The selection of the food provided showed me a much wider and more diverse range of local food. The tour has also been fascinating and really wasn't what I expected. I have learned an awful lot which can be pitched for the international visitor, the background behind the dish 'champ' for example. I've been on food tours in places like the Philippines where they are quite common and we are really catching up."



Caroline Wilson of The Foodie's Food and Drink Tour of Belfast with participants of the WorldHost 'Sales Powered by Service' programme

Industry development officer with Tourism NI Louise McKinstry concluded, "The message that the knowledge and delivery of our local produce is a core element of the tourism offering has really hit home in this, the Northern Ireland Year of Food and Drink."

Clandeboyne Estate rises to the top in dairy and diversification

As the only cow's milk yoghurt being produced in Northern Ireland, Clandeboyne Estate's award winning product holds a wholly unique position within the local dairy market.



Where it also rises to the top however is as the epitome of sustainability in a sector where sustainable food is an increasingly key trend. Defined as food processed in ways that: contributes to local economies; protects animal diversity; avoids damaging natural resources; and benefits society, Clandeboyne Estate yoghurt more than fits the 'sustainable' description. However, its impeccable credentials against this benchmark were not won by accident.

Having been devised in the first instance to use the milk from the estate's award-winning Holstein and Jersey herds, the yoghurt is part of a wider project for the County Down property. One of the largest privately owned estates in Ireland and home to the Marchioness of Dufferin and Ava, Lady Dufferin, the estate – like many of its kind – was struggling to survive financially. After exploring a range of commercial and environmental ventures that could make the estate financially viable now and for years to come, the milk was put to use and the original product line devised nine years ago.



Lady Dufferin's paintings of her award winning herd appear on the Clandeboyne Estate yoghurt pots

"I wanted to create a business that was sustainable in the long term and combine all the elements of Clandeboyne that are important," said Lady Dufferin, "not only the cows and their milk but also our determination to develop a company with sound eco-values and a commitment to local produce." That commitment to local produce, and indeed to local producers, even dictated the product that would be made, yoghurt rather than cheese, butter or other dairy products.

"We didn't want to compete with other locally made products," added Bryan Boggs, general manager of yoghurt production on the estate. "It was, of course, a unique selling point being the only cow's milk yoghurt being produced here but initially that was the deciding factor. When we looked at it further we saw the gap in the market for a quality Greek style yoghurt so we began with that and a natural yoghurt and from there saw a gradual build up."

Building on the success of the two core products, a flavoured range was added around five years ago, which itself has since been expanded.

"Expanding the range to incorporate flavours was a natural progression for the company but we were very careful to take our time with the move and make sure that our core products

were performing well before introducing flavours," said Lady Dufferin who embarked on a series of collaborations as part of the expansion.

"We enlisted the support of the product development team at Loughry College and Invest NI to come up with a range of flavours that we knew consumers would enjoy and then added new flavours seasonally."

The Clandeboyne Estate range now includes yoghurt smoothies of Mango and Blueberry as well as Madagascar Vanilla Greek style yoghurt, Blueberry yoghurt and the original Greek style yoghurt – five of which have been awarded Golds and Stars in the Great Taste awards. Stocked in all the major supermarkets in the north, distribution in the south has also been given a massive boost by its presence in the 120 Aldi supermarkets in the Republic. This expansion however has not seen any move away from the traditional, artisan processes that are crucial to the products' success and central to the ethos of the brand, says Bryan.

"From a standing start we are now in Tesco, Sainsbury's, Spar, Mace, SuperValu and are in the Aldi stores since they approached us after sampling the product at the Irish Quality Food Awards. However, it is still made using manual processes, blended by hand using traditional techniques that guarantee its rich, creamy texture without high fat content. The milk – which only comes from our herd of Holstein and Jersey cows – is prepared and cultured very gently over 24 hours in small batches, which helps create its exceptional flavour and texture."

So successful has the product become it is now one of the most profitable parts of the business, building Clandeboyne's financial sustainability as well as helping to protect animal diversity and natural resources.



Bryan Boggs, general manager of yoghurt production on the estate

"The dairy herd, which also includes a growing herd of Irish Moilies, Ulster's only rare breed of cattle, is not profitable but the yoghurt is dependent on the milk so it's entirely interdependent," explained Bryan.

"That element to the estate is very important, for example we farm our land in a sustainable way without being tempted into intensive land use and part of the estate is used to grow organic vegetables which are sold locally.

"We have recently invested in an anaerobic digester which breaks down manure to create electricity and will ultimately provide energy for other parts of the estate. We are also looking at starting up a social enterprise on the estate, which currently employs between 15 and 20 people. This is all part of the ethos of Clandeboyne and of Lady Dufferin's determination to cement its future sustainability and its legacy."

As to any Year of Food and Drink influence on that plan, Bryan is optimistic.

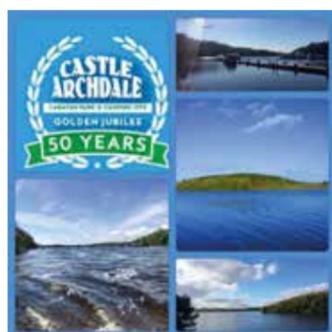
"What the initiative has done for us has been on the food service side of things where there has been a big increase in restaurants placing an emphasis on local food. Although the immediate impact in the retail sector isn't quite so apparent when your name is appearing on nice menus in the best restaurants it has a knock-on effect and I'd like to think there'd be a long-term gain."

Future focused caravan park hitches wagon to YoFaD

Find out more at www.castlearchdale.com or Castle Archdale Caravan Park on Facebook and on Twitter @castlearchdale



Despite celebrating its 50th anniversary during the Year of Food and Drink (YoFaD), it's all about the new at Castle Archdale Caravan Park where new partnerships and collaborations are creating new events to attract a new generation of holidaymaker to the County Fermanagh site.



Owned by the same family for almost half of those 50 years, the 20-acre facility offers the traditional caravan park facilities with static and touring pitches, camp sites, shops and games room, playgrounds and even water sports given its Lough Erne location.

Where Castle Archdale stands apart though is in its enthusiastic embracing of the Year of Food and Drink and a season-long programme of events tied in with its monthly themes. A brand new direction for its owners, now in their 24th season at the helm, Mandy Ellis explained why the future focused caravan park had hitched its wagon to the scheme.

"The Year of Food and Drink ties in with our Golden Jubilee celebration and has given a sharper focus to what we already do. People coming here on holiday are obviously needing to eat and it has made our job easier to build that need around special events."

One such special event took place at the start of June with Castle Archdale's Ice Cream Sunday kicking off that month's theme of Love Dairy. Working alongside Glastry Farm Ice Cream, whose product is stocked in the site shop, the collaborative aspect of the event was crucial to its success, said Mandy.

"We created the event around the ice cream with the help of Glastry who had a rep there to talk about the artisan nature of their product. We let the kids scoop their own ice cream and put on their own toppings. We are doing what we can within our own resources but we really couldn't do it without the help of the suppliers. It's been purely down to cooperation from them that has allowed these events to happen, we might not necessarily have been able to go down that route otherwise."

Such cooperation also saw a Bacon and Boxy event in March's Heritage and Traditions month, beer and cider tastings in April's Brewing and Distilling month and a foraging walk in Landscape and Places month in May. During the busy summer season the park hosted a Banquet by the Lake to jointly mark the 'Love NI Meat' theme as well as the park's Golden Jubilee with guests dining in style in a marquee overlooking Lower Lough Erne on the best local produce prepared by Saddlers of Enniskillen. A Black Pudding festival run in conjunction with Pat O'Doherty also took place in August as part of Love NI Meat month. And before that in July's Seas, Rivers and Loughs month there was a particularly unique collaboration for the forward thinking park with the renowned Mourne Seafood restaurant setting up as a pop up.

"In Fermanagh we have a lot of sites and caravan parks so we really wanted something to help us stand out," explained Mandy. "We do have a lot of visitors on the site from Belfast



who would be familiar with the Mourne Seafood brand but not in a Fermanagh setting so it gave us a unique selling point. A seafood restaurant is not something that you would usually associate with a caravan park so it's a real point of difference."

This unique collaboration is one that came about on 'a wing and a prayer' with each of the businesses having no prior contact, as Mandy explains. "We absolutely didn't know them at all, we sent an email on a wing and a prayer and fortunately for us they were delighted to get involved. I suppose from their perspective it's trying out a different market and for us it's brainstorming ideas and thinking outside the box. Fermanagh is an area of fabulous beauty and scenery and once you attract people here it's very easy to keep them."

That objective would seem to be being achieved with the park recording more new guests and more return visitors and a further uplift in pitch nights during the peak summer season.

"The success of the Year of Food and Drink events is hard to quantify exactly as we also have the Golden Jubilee celebrations – as well as a new play park – but we are definitely seeing an increase in footfall," she explained. "However, through face to face contact as well as our social media analysis we can see that the events draw people in and we know we have what it takes to keep them coming back."

Social media activity and digitally available YoFaD branding have also helped in 'joining the dots' of the caravan park's events, the online aspect of the business a crucial aspect of the venue's marketing.

"Online is where we find we have the most success in promoting whatever we're doing and gauging feedback from our visitors. We don't have the Giants Causeway and we don't have the attractions the North Coast is famous for but what we do have is unique. We have great food and a warm welcome, Fermanagh is one of the happiest counties and that's all part of the package as is our National Trust properties, Castle Coole, Crom and Florenceville," continued Mandy.

"There is a new generation out there who are spreading the word that we have this fabulous facility, on the lakes, in the middle of food central amongst all this beauty. The Year of Food and Drink has helped us shape that focus and its events are something we intend to continue in the future."

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June

Businesses reaping benefits from Year of Food & Drink activity

Follow-up research into pledges made by tourism businesses at Tourism NI's (TNI) Year of Food and Drink roadshows last year found the vast majority of respondents had put their plans into action and were reaping benefits from their activity.

TNI's Research and Development unit carried out the research after the series of roadshows which took place in Derry, Armagh, Ballynahinch and Enniskillen between 29 September and 2 October last year.

The survey, which asked whether pledges had been implemented, what additional activity had been generated and what respondents would like to see as the legacy of the Year of Food and Drink (YoFaD), was completed in June and saw a number of common themes emerge. Collaboration, awareness, the use of local produce and tying into bigger events were chief amongst those themes. Respondents ranged from small B and B owners, colleges, marketers and holiday providers to government departments and local councils.

Garden Show Ireland, which took place in Antrim Castle Gardens in May, encompassed the range of common themes highlighted by respondents by creating a 'Best of NI Local Produce' area at the show in collaboration with seven local councils. Other elements of YoFaD incorporated into the event included cooking demos by local and international chef using local produce, a primary schools' 'edible gardens' segment, talks by garden experts on growing fruit and veg and the promotion of local allotments.

Claire Faulkner of Garden Show Ireland said that promotional opportunities had also been increased through collaboration



Garden Show Ireland which took place at Antrim Castle Gardens in May was just one of the events which followed up on its pledges regarding the Year of Food and Drink

with local suppliers adding, "Increasing awareness by being seen to be part of a national campaign was useful and we did that by using the YoFaD branding throughout our own promotion."

Damian Donnelly of Ad_Man Creative Marketing – an 'active and ardent supporter of YoFaD' – also followed through on a range of activity including: a programme of marketing workshops; one-to-one advice for the food, drink and hospitality sector; the setting up of a #foodmarketingni Twitter account and a YoFaD blog as well as delivering a presentation at a major food tourism conference. Looking forward to what he hoped to see as the legacy of YoFaD Damian said, "Empowerment, capability and motivation to continue telling the story of our food and drink and the places it comes from."

Collaboration, events and awareness were to the fore again in the YoFaD activity enacted at Castle Archdale Caravan Park in Fermanagh who planned a full programme of innovative events in line with the YoFaD monthly themes working closely with local suppliers. Having already hosted a Bacon and Boxty event in March's Heritage and Traditions month, beer and cider tastings in April's Brewing and Distilling

month and a foraging walk in Landscape and Places month in May, they tied in with Glastry Farm for an Ice Cream Sunday in June and teamed up with O'Doherty's Fine Meats for a Black Pudding festival in Love NI Meat month in August.

"Some of the suppliers we have worked with had never been to Castle Archdale before so that in itself will be an advertisement for our business," said Mandy Ellis from the caravan park. "We have also had some great press coverage and Facebook traction through YoFaD related events. The number of local people calling in more regularly now has also increased as they become more aware that we are actually a very affordable day out. They are not only using our food offerings but are being introduced to our facilities and we anticipate that this will convert into more pitch nights when people will want to be onsite for our various events."



Chef Paula McIntyre hands-on at Garden Show Ireland.

James' innovative brewery and restaurant developed a number of new world beers in line with the theme for each

month which had included a Bacon Beer called 'Snout' for Breakfast Month, a 'Love Local' in February and a Crubeens and Stout for March's Heritage and Traditions month. Collaboration, the use of local produce and the creative utilization of by-products have also been embraced at the brewery.

"We have certainly pushed the use of local ingredients both within the business and also on the social media front," said James. "We have begun collaborations with a local chorizo company and our local craft butchers to make milk stout sausages and we are also investigating the opportunity of using our used brewers' grain and yeast to feed cattle and pigs then to use the meat for the restaurant."

James added that another benefit of the initiative was a sharp focus amongst business owners and employees on local produce.

"We have incredible local produce on our doorstep and don't need to import our ingredients and raw materials and the Year of Food and Drink is a fabulous platform for us to really show what NI can do when we all pull together."

Fermanagh Lakeland Tourism followed through on its pledges to support the YoFaD through a range of marketing initiatives and was also working closely with Erne Water Taxis on a water-based food trail in Fermanagh, as well as hosting its first ever restaurant week in the county in September.

Tanya Cathcart said of the TNI programme, "As a marketing organization we can offer another marketing platform for our members and show them how they can use the YoFaD to promote their premises or event. YoFaD offers Fermanagh an opportunity to showcase its food related experiences. By encouraging further food and drink related events it will encourage visitors to stay, repeat their visit and spend money in local restaurants and accommodation facilities."

Twin forces of food and tourism 'Awakening the Narrows'

Cheese maker, boat builder, ecologist and forager are just some of the labels attached to Celia Spouncer who is blazing a trail in community regeneration in Portaferry through the twin forces of food and tourism.

However, the landscape architect who gamely took on the restoration of a derelict guesthouse and restaurant three years ago, tends to defy classification given the diverse sectors she is embracing whilst breathing life back in to the 'Narrows Social'.

Beautifully situated on the waterfront overlooking the Narrows – the fast flowing channel which links Strangford Lough to the Irish Sea – the guesthouse offers a self-contained apartment and three ensuite bedrooms, which face the Game of Thrones' Winterfell, and is welcoming "heads on beds".

However, it is the passion and beliefs, the collaborations and partnerships on which Celia is building her eco-tourism project, that is fuelling regeneration as much as the building. Supper clubs, foraging events, art and music are just some of the elements being incorporated into this unique and innovative facility, as far away from the uniformity of hotel chains as it is possible to get. And it is this 'difference', this uniqueness that Celia is encouraging as the personality of the venue is cultivated.

"We are using the place as a theatre, a stage, with food and sustainability at the heart of the idea," explained Celia. "Artisan food is going bonkers around here and I'm personally going down the road of cheese making. Food on the Ards Peninsula and around Strangford Lough has a very



Celia Spouncer at her Narrows Social guesthouse in Portaferry

strong story and we have the fishing boats right outside here that I want to do more on. Then we have the Supper Clubs which we host in the restaurant which have been fabulously received already."

Those Supper Clubs have seen some of the biggest names in Irish cooking grace the kitchen of the Narrows Social with Darina Allen of the world famous Ballymaloe Cooking School just one of those making the trip to Portaferry. Her meal for 50 at a pop-up restaurant in the guesthouse has been followed by visits from Danny Millar and Niall McKenna, who brought seven of his sous chefs to forage on the shore. Celia's husband David Thompson leads foraging trips around the area with foraged foods a staple of the Supper Club's menus. Events like a Jawbox Gin night which saw the Belfast spirit served with smoked eel on seaweed bread, the seaweed foraged from the Narrows' shores, are helping to tie in to the wider objective of Celia's 'Awakening the Narrows' scheme.

"'Awakening the Narrows' is a multiple project, a lively food tourism project, that is where I'm coming from," she said.

www.thenarrowssocial.com or www.spouncerecology.com, on Twitter @narrowssocial, Facebook Celia Spouncer or LinkedIn Celia Spouncer.



As part of that project, a Four Course Foodie Menu prepared by guest chef, Brian Donnelly served up an 'Exploration of Fermentation' with sourdough bread and fermented butter flavoured with kimchi and dulse. Followed by an 'Overboard' course of cod tongues and cheeks served with treacle cured roe and sea vegetables, the menu was not for the unadventurous.

"A lot of people may have been ambiguous about the starter of cod tongue but it's a story that we can play with and get the conversation started," explained Celia, "you know, what is waste and what is not, why is something that is rejected here a delicacy elsewhere?"

Other conversations taking place around the Narrows Social are of collaboration and partnership, both with food producers and tourism providers. Partnered events such as Farmageddon beer and Young Buck cheese nights and tours with smaller operators have already been kick started by Celia and her peers. And for a guesthouse that offers views of Winterfell from its bedroom windows the opportunity is there to build greater networks, she believes.

"The Game of Thrones' attraction is one that we can definitely build on as guests go bonkers to see Winterfell from their rooms, and Robbs Field which can also be seen. The idea would be to target bespoke tours with people



tailoring their own trips. The food and the attractions around Portaferry and Strangford are so strong that anything is possible. It is not impossible for us to have a really strong food festival with the artisan producers we have around here."

The importance of events such as festivals in boosting the tourism offering has not been lost on the Ards Peninsula with a Portaferry Sails and Sounds event having taken place on June 17 and a Skiffie Festival in July. The Narrows Social took an active part in both events which, says Celia, also provide opportunities "to get the word out."

"We're hard to pin down so it's how to market us but our selling point is our difference and the unique events that we are creating around food, music and the attractions of the area. The desire to pull all the things I was passionate about together is highlighted by the fact that this restoration is entirely self-funded which shows the confidence I have in this project. I intend to continue in that vein."

Find more information on the project at www.thenarrowssocial.com or www.spouncerecology.com, on Twitter @narrowssocial, Facebook Celia Spouncer or LinkedIn Celia Spouncer.





High quality produce the winner at Game show

High quality produce and local culinary expertise was the name of the game in June at The Irish Game Fair and Fine Food Festival at Shane's Castle in Antrim.

The two-day festival, which ran on Saturday 25 June and Sunday 26 June, saw fine food and produce very much to the fore with celebrity chef cooking demos and a range of produce on show.

Celebrity chef Emmett McCourt hosted live cooking demos showcasing some of our top class products and highlighting the importance of provenance. A range of speciality foodstuffs were also showcased in a bustling marquee mall featuring a mouth-watering range of produce.



Ingrid Houwers; Michele Shirlow, Chief Executive of Food NI; Great Game Fairs' celebrity chef, Emmett McCourt; Cathy Chaudran of Lough Neagh Eels and Jane Harnett from Harnett Oils

A speciality cheese producer which was saved from closure by one of the north's largest dairy companies relaunched its award-winning cheeses to coincide with June's Love Dairy month.

Fivemiletown Creamery in County Tyrone faced closure in 2014 before being bought over by Dale Farm, the UK's largest dairy cooperative. Owned by 1,300 local farmers, Dale Farm relaunched the brand in Love Dairy month with the help of Masterchef winner Jane Devonshire and Simon Dougan of Yellow Door. The newly appointed Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Michelle McIlveen was also in attendance at the celebratory event.



Dale Farm Group CEO, David Dobbin, Masterchef champion Jane Devonshire, DAERA Minister Michelle McIlveen and Simon Dougan of The Yellow Door

To celebrate the theme of Love Dairy throughout the month of June, Tourism NI held a special event at the Spaniard Bar in Belfast featuring a selection of Northern Ireland's finest cheese and craft beer producers.

The Kearney Cheese Company brought along their award-winning blue cheese from Kearney Village in Co Down, City Cheese provided some delectable raw cow's milk cheese freshly shaved off the block and Fivemiletown Creamery presented a selection of their scrumptious soft brie and cheddar cheese. Hercules Brewery poured deliciously smooth Yardsman Original Double Stout, Farmageddon served up refreshingly light unfiltered ale that is suitable for vegans and Clearsky Brewing provided hand crafted authentic craft beer.

Lough Neagh initiative is the 'eel' deal

Seas, Rivers and Loughs month saw one of Northern Ireland's most prestigious hotel groups throw its weight behind an initiative designed to promote Lough Neagh eels. The chefs at the Hastings Hotels Group created an innovative and exciting menu as part of Eel-Eat Week which ran from 25 June to 2 July.

Created by the Lough Neagh Partnership and the Lough Neagh Fishermen's Co-operative, the initiative aimed to boost consumption of Lough Neagh eels in the domestic market.

Sponsored by Tourism NI's Year of Food and Drink Tourism Events Scheme and supported by Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council, the scheme saw participating restaurants include Lough Neagh eel on their menus for the week. The restaurants at each of Hastings' four and five star hotels also included pollan on their special Lough Neagh menus which ran for the entire month of July.



Marketing manager at Lough Neagh Partnership, Eimear Kearney helps launch the initiative

The initiative is part of a bigger push at promoting Lough Neagh eel locally and encouraging more chefs to feature the north's first ever Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) foodstuff. Organisers have teamed up with Food NI on a chef steering forum bringing chefs on to the lough to meet local fishermen, demonstrating traditional cooking methods as well as facilitating visits to the Co-operative's facilities and contacts with local suppliers. A wider European food project is also being targeted.



One of the eel dishes served up by the chefs at Hastings Hotels Group during Eel-Eat Week

"We are sourcing partners for different elements that we would like to see developed around the lough," said marketing manager at Lough Neagh Partnership, Eimear Kearney, "with cookery schools, a fish restaurant on the lough shore, foraging trips and food trails among the plans. We see food as one of our key attractions to the area and have a protected designation of origin (PDO) application for Lough Neagh pollan pending as well."

"We want to show just how much eels are part of our food culture and how that can boost Lough Neagh and its Waterways as a destination."

Lough food trail Earnes its stripes in unchartered waters

It might seem contradictory for those behind a water taxi service to enter unchartered waters but that's the case with a Fermanagh couple running Ireland's only water-based food trail.

Barry and Helen Flanagan launched Erne Water Taxis in March along with the Lough Erne Food Trail which offers a series of tours around the lake. Placing food, landscape and story at the heart of the visitor offering, the trail captures the essence of the Year of Food and Drink and was launched to coincide with the initiative.

"We wanted to do something for the Year of Food and Drink with the food trail being the idea from the beginning," said Barry. "As we all know there has been a growing recognition of food as a vital part of our culture, heritage and landscape but here in Fermanagh I'd seen an even greater awareness since the G8 summit. That event put a global focus on Fermanagh as a place with top quality local produce with chefs like Noel McMeel [head chef at the Lough Erne Resort where the world leaders gathered] shouting from the rooftops about its quality. That confidence spreads and the Year of Food and Drink has given people yet another opportunity to buy into that."



Barry and Helen Flanagan's Erne Water Taxis out on the lough

Having come up with the idea for the business then scheduling its launch for the early part of the year the couple, who had extensive experience in the tourism industry, put their contacts to work firstly targeting the local producers they believed would be critical to their success.

"We needed good local produce to put the trail together in the first instance but we also needed the producers' specialist knowledge," Barry explained. "We said 'we need you to tell us what's unique about your product so we can speak knowledgeably about it' which they were delighted to do. Once they came on board we could then approach the hotels."

Having secured the cooperation of leading local producers such as Sheelin's Ale, O'Doherty's Fine Meats and Erin Grove Preserves for their taste samples and Islander Picnic Hamper, the Killyhevlin Hotel and Lough Erne Resort and restaurants such as the Manor House and Watermill were next to be approached. Looking for a 'grand finale' for the food trail in the shape of a high end dining experience, the pair were again delighted with the response.

To find out more about Lough Erne Food Tours visit www.ernewatertaxi.com



"We approached the water based restaurants and hotels and again just laid out our plan saying 'we are developing this food trail and would you be interested in providing the finale?' Everyone was very helpful and really encouraging and the collaborative aspect of it has been amazing. The Killyhevlin for instance has gone above and beyond the norm and have created a bespoke taster menu as part of the trail."

'Bespoke' and 'targeting' have been key elements for the tour business which is now well and truly afloat and accounting for over 70 per cent of the overall business with a Lough Erne Hop, Upper Erne Experience, Lower Erne Experience and Lough Erne Expedition running alongside the signature food trail. With the focus very much on the visitor market, Barry recognises the importance of a bespoke offering and responding to clients' specific demands.



"We wanted to tick a lot of boxes for the outside visitor who wanted to come in and experience local culture through our food, heritage and landscape. The challenge in Fermanagh is with the footfall so we set out with the intention of creating bespoke and speciality tours such as the food trail and a heritage trail where we visit the historic sites that cover the lake. There's so much on the lough from Tully Castle and the monastic sites like Devenish Island and Inishmacsaint that heritage has to be weaved through what we do." Those bespoke offerings are now being extended to Sunset Tours, a time when, according to Barry, the lough is a hive of activity.

"It's a great landscape to be in at that time of the day but you won't get many tours out in the evening but it's also to highlight that we can go out at any time of the day, it just really depends what our visitor wants. If they're into photography or nature, it's just incredible and we are here to cater for that or indeed any other need."

As for the continuing connection with the Year of Food and Drink, September seen the business play a prominent part in Fermanagh Restaurant Week which took place as part of Festival Lough Erne, a celebration of local food and the Fermanagh waterways.



"We used the branding and created events specifically for Restaurant Week and the food festival. The word is spreading about what we have to offer and when we all come together in events like these, the quantity as well as the quality of our local produce – and its importance to our culture – is clear."



Councils Cook Your Catch event reels in the plaudits

The latest in a series of events organised by Mid and East Antrim Borough Council as part of the Year of Food and Drink took place in July to coincide with Seas, Rivers and Loughs month.

The 'Cook Your Catch' event, which took place at Blackhead Path in Whitehead, saw participants fish for cod, colli and pollock before cooking up their haul at a seaside barbecue.

The event, which is part of an innovative 'Wild About Food' calendar put together in collaboration with Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council and funded by Heritage Lottery Fund, was hailed by Deputy Mayor of Mid and East Antrim Borough, Councillor William McNeilly. Cllr McNeilly said the shoreline initiative was a great way to celebrate the Borough's local coastlines and natural larder.

"This was a fantastic event showcasing our local landscapes and local produce and was part of our 'Wild About Food' project which has been running since May 2016. The 'Wild About Food' project is our contribution to Northern Ireland's Year of Food and Drink and its series of monthly themes followed by Mid and East Antrim. The theme for July is 'Seas, Rivers and Loughs' and we have certainly lived up to this by showcasing our seaside town of Whitehead."

For more information on the Wild About Food programme please visit www.antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk and www.midandeastantrim.gov.uk



Chef Susan Anderson and Bobby Laughlin of Carrickfergus Beach & Rockers celebrate the day with Deputy Mayor William McNeilly

To mark Seas, Rivers and Loughs month Tourism NI held a special event at Belfast Cookery School where local chef Stephen Jeffers taught a selection of local press how to cook two delicious meals using fish from Ewings Fishmongers. Crawford Ewing from Ewing's Fishmongers talked about how important it was to include fish in your diet and encouraged everyone to try more.

As well as being shown a menu full of fresh, delicious fish and vegetables, the amateur cooks were taught useful techniques to make the perfect fish dish to wow any dinner party guests.



Molly Cunningham from Food NI, Stephen Jeffers from Belfast Cookery School, Crawford Ewing from Ewing Seafood's and Rachel Quigg from Tourism NI

Culinary maestros turn up the heat in the Clipper Race Kitchens

Internationally renowned chef Jean-Christophe Novelli joined a host of local culinary maestros at the Clipper Race Kitchens at the Foyle Maritime Festival in July.

Jenny Bristow, Paula McIntyre, Noel McMeel, Brian McDermott and Ian Orr joined the French chef for the gastronomic gala which kicked off on Thursday, 14 July and ran until Friday, 17 July.

Hosted by Derry City and Strabane District Council, Clipper Race Kitchens featured popular local restaurants cooking signature dishes for visitors to 'try and buy' from around £5 as well as live cookery demos and sampling in the huge Clipper Race Kitchen marquee, which also incorporated an impressive Flavours of the Foyle showcase.

Other elements of the four-day extravaganza included the Clipper Race Food Pavilion marquee which showcased top local artisan food producers, while the Clipper Race Village was the 'go to' destination for the finest locally sourced street food.

An innovative ice cream created specifically for the Derry stage of the Clipper Round the World yacht race was also introduced to Jean-Christophe during his visit.

The newly created Saint Brendan's Ice Cream was developed by Glastry Farm Ice Cream and Niche Drinks, the producers of Saint Brendan's Irish Cream Liqueur.

The Saint Brendan's Ice Cream, which is now part of Glastry's established portfolio of 20 ice cream flavours and three sorbets, came about after Derry and Strabane Council's suggestion to the companies that they collaborate on a new product to mark the event which ran as part of the Maritime Festival.

Clipper Race Kitchens was supported by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs' NI Agri Food Programme, Tourism NI and Loughs Agency through the Sustainable Development Fund.



Michele Shirlow, Chief Executive, Food NI, Will Taylor, Glastry Farm Ice Cream, Hilary McClintock, Mayor of Derry, French celebrity chef Jean Christophe-Novelli, Robin Young, St Brendan's Irish Cream and Mary Blake, Events Executive, Derry and Strabane District Council

Moy Park's YoFaD activity comes home to roost

One of the important contributors to industry engagement with Tourism NI's Year of Food and Drink (YoFaD) has been that 'size doesn't matter', with participation from single outfit sole businesses as crucial to its success as big money brand campaigns.

However, when the region's largest private sector business - and one of the UK's top 15 food companies - throws its weight behind the idea it can only be taken as a major vote of confidence for the 12-month-long initiative designed to place food and drink at the heart of the visitor experience.

That business is Moy Park, Ireland's number one poultry brand and the north's largest private employer with around 8,500 workers locally. With 13 European processing and manufacturing sites and the capacity to process 240 million birds annually, the influence of the organisation cannot be underestimated. Having joined the Brazilian JBS Group in 2015 the company, which grew from a County Tyrone farm in the 1940s, is now part of the largest protein company in the world.

"People really underestimate the size of the business," said Briega Finnegan who as Brand Marketing Manager is responsible for marketing Moy Park branded products throughout the NI/ROI and GB markets. "We employ over 12,000 people and in addition to chicken, we are also a leading manufacturer of turkey having acquired O'Kane Poultry in Ballymena in 2010.



Moy Park mascot Moy P at the promotional 'bus shelter oven' in Belfast city centre

"As such a key player in the Northern Ireland agri-food industry we are committed to the growth of the food sector and the Year of Food and Drink provides the ideal platform for us to showcase our produce. The Year is a very exciting time for Northern Ireland and a real chance to highlight the quality of our food and tourism offering."

Moy Park's YoFaD activity has been carefully integrated into its strategic marketing plan for 2016, which focuses on the quality and innovation of the brand. Throughout 2016 the Moy Park brand maintained a strong presence at trade and consumer shows to raise awareness amongst customers and consumers - and has also engaged in a number of tactical partnerships including sponsorship of UTV Ireland's Ant and Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway and the Dubai Duty Free Irish Open.

Like the Year of Food and Drink, the company's campaign messages focus on provenance, heritage and expertise with August's 'Love NI Meat Month' providing a perfect opportunity to promote both the Moy Park range and local meat produce.

'Meat Month' we wanted to create something really unique and engaging for consumers so we teamed up with local chef Jenny Bristow to visit key iconic locations in our 'Little Yellow Sampling Van' where Jenny created delicious chicken recipes," said Briega.

"We travelled with Jenny to Titanic Belfast, Ebrington Square in Derry and the Giant's Causeway to film recipe videos for our social media channels. The main platform for our meat month activity was social media - it's a great way to engage with our consumers."

Moy Park has engaged in a range of innovative and varied marketing activity throughout the year including a bus shelter transformed into an 'outdoor oven' in Belfast city centre to promote and drive sales of Moy Park's Roast in the Bag range. The Balmoral Show, in which the company take part every year, was also made extra special by the Year of Food and Drink, added Briega.

"This year we had the Moy Park corporate marquee for our customers and growers as well as our popular stand in the NI Food Pavilion. Visitors to the show had the chance to sample Moy Park's delicious product range, as well as giving them a chance to putt their way to the Irish Open with a special golf-themed activity."

Golf themed activity has played a major part in Moy Park's marketing strategy over recent years with sponsorship of the Dubai Duty Free Irish Open providing a platform for raising brand awareness and promoting engagement.

And although Love NI Meat month has passed, the company is far from done with its YoFaD plans and is looking forward to the first BBC Good Food Show to be held in Belfast this Autumn.

"Oh, we're far from finished," explained Briega. "Our Little Yellow Van will be taking up residence in Belfast's Waterfront Hall for the inaugural BBC Good Food Show Belfast. We will be sampling from our popular breaded range as well as inviting visitors to have a go on our spin and win wheel - and of course Moy P will be on hand to entertain the crowds.

"We are also sponsoring the Interview Stage at the Show. As part of this sponsorship visitors to the show will get the opportunity to listen as our Moy Park chef team impart their wisdom on the latest trends when it comes to cooking chicken, using dark meat and their culinary adventures."

As to the impact and legacy of the Year of Food and Drink for the company Briega concluded, "We believe the impact of the NI Year of Food and Drink will be increased awareness of the Moy Park brand achieved through sampling and engagement, which will in turn drive sales. The NI Year of Food and Drink, so far, has provided a fantastic backdrop for food companies to get on board and have some fun while promoting fantastic local produce - and that's exactly what we've done through our activity this year."



Jenny Bristow and Briega Finnegan of Moy Park in the Little Yellow Sampling Van at Titanic

Fire for hire at mobile BBQ doing a roaring trade

Even in August's Love NI Meat month it wasn't just about the meat but how and where it's cooked that got the gastric juices going. With the tagline of 'You book it, I cook it' Pauline McGurk has those bases covered as well as many others with her Dot's Kart mobile barbecue.

The unique food service business hit the road last year with Pauline's 30 years of catering experience driving the new venture. Since then she has moved through the gears having created her very own niche and is busy targeting and catering for the growing corporate and private markets. From builders to bishops and birthday parties, she attracts a wide clientele and, with the added advantage of mobility, is taking her services across the country.

"Everybody loves a barbecue but they hate doing them", says Pauline who not only provides the food but all cutlery and crockery as well. "With Dot's Kart all the client needs is somewhere for people to sit, I bring the food, the plates, the side dishes and look after all the rest. For example, I recently did a BBQ for 200 people on a building site where there was nothing but a hut for making tea. I've also done a garden party for the Archbishop of Armagh, Eamon Martin so the range is wide and varied and I'm keeping very busy."



Pauline McGurk with her Dot's Kart mobile barbecue

Along with the staple BBQ offering of steaks, sausages and burgers, Pauline also customises menus on request, providing the bespoke service crucial to business success today. Coupled with her use of purely local produce, she is cooking up the perfect recipe being highlighted by the Northern Ireland Year of Food and Drink.

"All my food is prepared fresh, from the coleslaw to the sauces, all of which I prepare myself. I buy the vegetables locally and use the local butcher in Magherafelt, Diamond Meats. I've also started serving buffalo which, believe it or not, I'm sourcing locally."

The buffalo is indeed being reared on Ballyriff Farm in Magherafelt (see page 28) and led to one particularly unique booking earlier in the summer.

"I put on a purely buffalo BBQ with buffalo burgers, steaks and sausages for neighbours of the farm who were watching the herd being reared and wanted to sample it for

Find out more about Dot's Kart on www.dotskart.com and on Facebook at Dot's Kart BBQ



themselves. I've also done a lot of work with the eel fishery in Toome and serve up street eel and eel suppers at a range of events across the area."

Those events have included the Irish Game Fair and Fine Food Festival and the revitalised Toome Fair, one of the oldest horse fairs in Ireland. At such gatherings the growing phenomenon of food and drink as a crucial part of the visitor experience is very much apparent.

"The Year of Food and Drink has definitely raised the profile, people are not only paying more attention but more people are getting involved," said Pauline. "It's become even more important now to have a reputation for good, fresh, local food and I make everything I can make as far as salads and sauces go. I don't use prepacked coleslaw or salads and source all I can locally."

Pauline's commitment to fresh, local ingredients has been a long-standing value and over a decade ago the then school catering manager implemented 'Jamie Oliver style' school dinners. Long before the celebrity chef made his high-profile documentary Pauline was improving the quality and nutritional value of school dinners locally, to the extent that her ground-breaking work was officially recognised. In 2006 she was awarded a Janus Award for Management Professionalism in Large Scale Catering, becoming the only woman to win the award and beating off such competition as Campbell Catering and Malmaison and Radisson hotels.

She is continuing to break the mould with this latest venture as a street food trader whose main business is private – and the word is spreading.

"Although I do the odd event where I sell directly to the public I found that market can be swamped so that influenced my decision to target the corporate and private markets," she explains. "I do everything from pre and post wedding parties

to hen and stag parties and the most recent interest has been from schools. Principals are seeking catering for staff development days, sports days and special events so that is continuing to grow and I'm currently doing between four and five barbecues a week.

"I recently filmed a piece with UTV Ireland with Bobby Kerr from RTÉ's Dragons Den called Along Home Shores. That took place on the shores of Lough Neagh in Ballyronan. I also took part in a shoot for Irish TV in May for the programme Tyrone Matters where I tied in with Lowe Brothers master butchers in Stewartstown."

Such collaborations are crucial for continued business expansion, says Pauline, who plans to do further work with the buffalo farm. The Tyrone woman, who lives in Magherafelt, is also keen to see food tourism grow in the Mid Ulster area and with facilities continually improving sees this as a real possibility.

"There's a real opportunity for food trails around the lough given the fishing traditions with eel, pollan and the like. With the Seamus Heaney centre opening and other Heaney related events more people will be coming into the area and we have more than enough to cater for them. Like everything else it's a case of getting ourselves organised and getting the support to do that."



Farming family grab agri-food challenges by the horns

Check out Ballyriff Buffalo on Facebook and on Twitter @NIBuffalo



A South Derry farming family who've worked their land through seven generations have grabbed the challenges in the agri-food industry firmly by the horns.

The O'Briens from Ballyriff, struggling to see a future in the production of beef, are now breeding and producing buffalo on their land near Magherafelt. The only buffalo farm in the north, Ballyriff boasts a herd of 50 strong and is into its third generation of breeding after starting off with just four animals.

It's not the first time the dyed-in-the-wool farmers have diversified to survive with patriarch Mickey O'Brien having moved from dairy farming in the past. And with beef going the way of milk in terms of profitability, his latest move was aimed at the future and that of his family, says son Barry.

"In the long term the farm wouldn't have been a farm and that wasn't an option for us as a family so my father was happy enough to give it a go, he's always been one to take a chance. He said that he would start it off but in the long run it would be me that was pushing it so we weren't making any money with the beef and at least I could see a future with the buffalo."

The choice of buffalo as the product was as random as its presence in rural Derry, a fact not lost on the amiable 30-year-old, who describes them as "lovely animals, really inquisitive" despite the dangers associated with handling the tonne weight beasts.



Barry O'Brien from Ballyriff Buffalo

"We've needed special fencing and the pens and cattle houses have had to be converted as well as a specifically designed crush, the buffalo are that much larger. The first day we put them in the field was absolutely hilarious, you could hear the screeching of the brakes when drivers caught a glimpse of them as they went down the road. It's not exactly what you expect to see in a field in South Derry."

Just as it wasn't what Mickey O'Brien was expecting to see on a holiday in Cork five years ago when he went out for a stroll and a buffalo popped its head over a hedge.

"My father couldn't believe it and walked on in to see what the craic was and got talking to the fella there who's the only other breeder in Ireland. He then came back and found a herd in Italy and brought four of them over, now that number's gone up to 50 in the last five years."

Barry himself had been working in New Zealand but returned home this time last year and since then has developed the farm shop, a butchery and the business' social media. Producing burgers, sausages, silverside roasts and steaks, the meat – which he butchers himself – speaks for itself, he says, both in quality and value for money. Containing half the fat of ordinary meat and between 40 to 60 percent lower in cholesterol, buffalo meat also provides twice as much calcium and protein as beef.

"The animal itself doesn't hold fat on the inside so the meat's leaner than 90 per cent lean beef and you can see it's better value for money because it doesn't shrink when you cook it. We live on it round here, it's a sweeter taste and is really meaty and there's a lovely aftertaste of it, my favourite is the burger with homemade chips.

"The shop has been a success and we've had a lot of returning custom and with the Facebook page and word of mouth, things are surely growing. People will place orders by text or through social media and we will have it sitting waiting for them, Monday to Friday from 6pm to 8pm."

Ballyriff Buffalo has also hit the road, having recently attended its first 'foodie' event as part of this year's River to Lough festival. Such was the positive response they are now planning on setting out their stall at farmers' markets across the north and are looking at a delivery run to spread the word even further.

"We have been giving out samples to allow people to try it as they can be reticent when you say it's buffalo but once they taste it it's a different matter and I'd say nine out of ten people end up buying something," said Barry. "It's like when we first contacted the restaurants about it a lot of them laughed, they weren't too sure about us at all. Then people like Eddie Atwell of Ardtara Country House took it on and Simplicity in Magherafelt who got in touch with us about the

burgers and order off us every week. When you consider that the time from their order to his fridge can be as little as 25 minutes, you can't get much fresher than that."

The growing importance of provenance and quality – as highlighted by the Year of Food and Drink – has also been significant in the growing interest from both consumers and the food service industry and is paving the way for the O'Briens' next development.

"It's a process of when we can get to that stage but we've had people inquiring about the buffalo cheese and milk, a lot from Italian restaurants who'd be delighted to source that locally if they could. I take a lot of time over what I'm doing as quality is what it's all about and if you're getting good quality food on your doorstep than that's hard to beat."





Game on as Baronscourt savours venison success

Baronscourt Estate in County Tyrone has one of the largest herds of pure Sika deer in Ireland with its wild venison securing a range of Great Taste Awards. As part of August's Love NI Meat month, Lord Jamie Hamilton, who is directly involved in the running of Baronscourt's game food business, spoke of his love for the 400-year-old estate which is also his ancestral home.

"I am particularly proud of our game food business as the growth in venison sales is something we have really excelled at in a very short period of time. Providing a really healthy, sustainable food which has been awarded such great feedback and commendation from the top food judges in the UK has been very gratifying."

The estate has been producing game and venison for the commercial market for a number of years and recently invested in facilities to improve its packaging and labelling, as well as being able to produce more sophisticated cuts and products such as the French rack of venison and burgers and sausages.

The Sika deer is renowned for its flavour, often said to be milder in strength than the more readily available commercial venison from Red deer, leading to a gentler, rounder flavour. While Baronscourt has always enjoyed a local demand for its venison, Lord Hamilton said: "Increased consumer appreciation and demand for food that has been

produced sustainably without any additives or subjected to any intense rearing practices, combined with its high nutritional value and healthy characteristics, has increased the popularity of venison. In addition, the rise in popularity of TV cookery shows and celebrity chefs has led to consumers becoming more confident in cooking less well known foods and learning just how easy it is to cook game.

"We have in the past supplied the prestigious Fortnum and Mason store in London, who experienced huge demand for our wild venison," said Lord Hamilton, who added that traceability is also paramount.



Lord Hamilton with venison French rack from the estate

"Baronscourt is one of only a handful of estates to operate a fully Approved Game Handling Establishment which is licensed under European Union legislation, is approved and audited by the Food Standards Agency and is subjected to weekly checks by the Veterinary Public Health Unit

of the Department of Agriculture," he added. "It is this chain of custody which is so important to both us and our customers and we have invested heavily over the years to ensure we are compliant with the regulations."

For further information visit www.barons-court.com

Magnificent Mela marks decade of diversity by feeding into YoFaD

Belfast Mela's decade long success at melding international culture and local communities was reflected again at this year's event with a special focus on the Year of Food and Drink.

The exotic festival of global identities has long been a showcase of the culture and cuisine of a wealth of nations and, with support from the Year of Food and Drink Tourism Events Scheme, global gastronomy combined with great local produce in a delicious cultural fusion.

A total of 48 food related events have been supported from the £300,000 Tourism NI fund secured from central government. Allocation of the budget, designed to enhance and uplift the food and drink element of existing events or create a new authentic food and drink experience, boosted even further Mela's culinary offering.

"This year global cuisine wafted luscious aromas around the park as Belfast Mela paid tribute to Northern Ireland Year of Food & Drink 2016," said Festival Director Nisha Tandon.

"International chefs combined their talents and culinary heritage with great local produce to provide fabulous dishes to sample and enjoy."



This year's Mela hosts, Marc Mallet of UTV and Carolyn Stewart from U105, with Wendy McGuire who delighted audiences with a taste of the Caribbean



(L-R) Chef Andy Rea from the Mourne Seafood Bar, Karl Banks from The Hillside, Shannon Graham and Derek Patterson from The Plough

The 24th Hillsborough International Oyster Festival took place in August featuring an eight-day programme full of fine food and festivities.

Supported by Tourism NI's National Tourism Events Sponsorship Scheme and boosted by 2016's Year of Food and Drink Tourism Events Scheme, the festival has grown into one of Northern Ireland's premier events.

Featuring world class chefs and quality local produce the Year of Food and Drink threw an extra focus on culinary skills and provenance as part of the prestigious programme. One example of this was seen at a Gourmet Pop-up Restaurant which, after debuting at last year's event, returned with a four-course menu prepared by top local chefs and a special appearance from top chef Richard Corrigan. The Gourmet Pop-up Restaurant also boasted a fine bill of fare from Derek Patterson of The Plough in Hillsborough, Andy Rea from the Mourne Seafood Bar and Karl Banks from The Hillside with each chef performing a live cooking demonstration of their signature dishes.

Aug

Food festival trailblazers add 'Meat and Greet' to programme

Féile an Phobail has long set the standard for a host of ground-breaking events with its International Food Fayre one of its many trailblazing successes.

A highlight of the Féile programme for the last 15 years or so, the fair could arguably claim the title of the first major food tourism event in the city, showcasing as it does the range of international cuisine being cooked up in restaurants – and homes – across Belfast. Designed to integrate and educate on ethnic cuisine and therefore culture, festival organisers were among the first to make the link between food and heritage and the wider visitor offering now being promoted by the Year of Food and Drink.

That initiative this year helped Féile to turn the spotlight on local food with a 'Meat and Greet' addition to the event which took place in August's Love NI Meat month. With the allocation of additional support from the Year of Food and Drink Tourism Events Scheme, the 'Meat and Greet' saw speakers and guests from across the globe introduced to local cuisine. The idea behind the further development of the International Food Fayre was to showcase local food to some of the key influencers from overseas who were in the city to address Féile audiences. Sponsorship from the £300,000 fund provided by central government was pivotal to the local food promotion, explained Féile an Phobail director Kevin Gamble.

"The dinner table, and the sharing of food is the cornerstone of cultures all over the world, and people from many of these cultures are our neighbours in west Belfast. This sponsorship gave us a wonderful opportunity to showcase international cuisines on our doorstep and how they bind the communities that produce them as well as the wider community as a whole. Huge thanks to Tourism NI for



International cuisine and local produce combined at Féile an Phobail's 'Meat and Greet' at the International Food Fayre in August

making the inaugural Meat and Greet such a great success, and one we're looking forward to developing in future years as Ireland's biggest community festival."

The coveted title of Great Taste Supreme Champion was this year awarded to Hannan Meats, the first producer in the 22-year history of the event to take the top award for a second time. The Armagh company's Glenarm Shorthorn 4 Rib Roast was awarded the honour at the start of September, coming out on top from a total of 10,000 entries. Great Taste judges heaped praise on the product for its outstanding flavour and succulence saying the meat, which is dry-aged in a Himalayan Salt Chamber for a minimum of 28 days – had 'blown the judging panel away'.

Hannan Meats' second Supreme Champion accolade follows its success in 2012 for its Moyallon Guanciale. Peter Hannan and his team have been perfecting this salt chamber dry-aging process for the best part of a decade, with this award the culmination of many years of dedication. The company's world-class butchery and maturation methods wowed the judging panel, who said they "couldn't believe that beef could taste so good".