



AN EVALUATION REPORT ON

# THE SOMERSET FOOD TRAIL FESTIVAL 2022

Prepared by  
Sustainable Food Somerset  
October 2022



# Evaluating the Somerset Food Trail Festival '22



## ABOUT THE EVENT

The Somerset Food Trail Festival, 15-24th July 2022, was a ten-day, countywide farm-to-fork showcase, seeking to 'lift the lid on the farms, people and places behind Somerset's most flavourful and nature-friendly food'. Based on the open studios format of Somerset Art Weeks, the festival aimed to shine a spotlight on Somerset's smaller-scale, more regenerative farmers and artisan producers. A total of 198 enterprises took part, attracting over 8,500 visitors from within the county and beyond.

## VOLUNTEERS AND CREATIVE PARTNERS

It was organised by Wells Food Network (now called Sustainable Food Somerset). We are a board of five trustees working on a voluntary basis. We gathered a team of 25 'cluster co-ordinators' across the county, with the local knowledge and contacts to identify and recruit potential Trail participants – farms, food producers and food outlets that would become Trail destinations, hosting events to champion sustainable food during the festival.

In many cases these cluster coordinators co-curated and put on events themselves as part of the Trail. We are hugely grateful to them for their hard work over many months to produce and help publicise what was a really high quality festival that undoubtedly raised awareness of agroecological farming in Somerset.

Our creative partnership with Take Art was equally fruitful. Their EU-funded *Cultivate* project brought a dynamic, family-friendly, performance element to the festival across South Somerset which helped us access a broader demographic. Their live events brought significant extra 'pulling power' to rural Trail venues, expanding the geographical footprint and cultural impact of the Trail. We are now convinced the arts are crucial to telling the story of nature-friendly farming and food in imaginative and powerful ways. We look forward to working with Take Art to develop this further.

## FUNDING SUPPORT

Fundraising started during lockdown, prioritising grant funding over commercial sponsorship. Local authorities were generally receptive – quick to see the festival's economic and business potential as a new, countywide 'visitor attraction'. The focus on sustainability also struck a chord, tying into policy imperatives highlighted in Somerset's Climate Emergency Strategy (2020), which identified local authorities' crucial role in 'promoting healthy and climate-friendly and nature-friendly choices to residents'.

In this sense, the event was dual purpose: both a tourist attraction and a platform for a public awareness campaign about the benefits of agroecological or 'nature friendly' farming – for health, for rebuilding biodiversity, for reducing and sequestering greenhouse gas emissions, for climate change resilience and food security. Our marketing communications around the festival, and many of the events put on, reflected these key themes.

Largely because of this focus, we qualified for funding from WWF UK's Land, Food and Farming Fund, which challenged recipients to "**win the narrative on the need for – and benefits of – land use change and sustainable agriculture**". We were one of only five out of several hundred applicants to win funding, and it was pivotal for us. It helped upskill our team and allowed us to scale up the marketing of the festival at a crucial time, to reach a much wider audience than would otherwise have been possible.

“ Participating in the Food Trail made a significant difference to our farm and farm shop, providing the opportunity to show people the difference that farming organically makes to the environment and animal welfare.

Rob Walrond, Glebe Farm

Did we 'win' the narrative? Yes, we hope and believe so! We certainly got the subject of sustainable food and farming 'out there' in Somerset this Summer (p5), in local, national and social media, and we hope, into the consciousness of local policy makers. We attracted **8,500 visitors** and **193 participating enterprises** – and **85% of visitors** said they would come again. Since the festival in July, this awareness raising and advocacy work has continued in various forms, with plans for next year's festival underway and new initiatives (including a 'Good Food Charter' for Somerset and a Sustainable Food Summit) in the pipeline.

# Evaluating the Somerset Food Trail 2022



## EVALUATION PROCESS

We monitored various Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to understand how successful the Festival was, using a range of quantitative and qualitative data from online metrics (website page impressions etc) to survey responses, interviews and vox pops.

It was quite tough to get people to fill in feedback surveys! Our visitor survey received 49 responses from visitors who had attended 21 different events (fewer than we'd hoped) whilst our participant survey received 48 responses from a possible 198. Responses were geographically representative. Farmers and growers, artisanal drink makers and community groups were slightly over represented and artisanal food makers, markets, pubs & eateries and special events were slightly under represented.

## KEY FINDINGS

Feedback from visitors, participants and other key stakeholders, via surveys, interviews and other informal channels, has been crucial to measuring the impact of the Trail and a useful evidential basis for decision-making going forward.

Feedback was broadly very positive but the process also revealed a number of areas where we can improve the 'user experience' next time (for visitors, participants, volunteers and stakeholders), and some unexpected benefits of the Trail. We were surprised, for example, at the potential for business-to-business interaction the Festival offered – illustrated by the case of Dowding's Apple Juice & Cider which has several new business leads as a result of contacts found in the festival brochure.

Key questions the findings lead us to address are:

- How do we speak to new audiences and avoid 'preaching to the converted' in future?
- How can we streamline event production next time?
- How important are direct sales as a measure of the success of the Festival?
- Could more events be ticketed?
- Could the brochure be conceived as a directory or 'annual' with a longer shelf life to optimise its value as a communications tool? Do we *need* a printed brochure?

“The brochure provided a comprehensive list of other Somerset farmers, food producers, retailers and the like. We used this to contact other local businesses, making a number of new friends, contacts and new customers.

Jane O'Meara, Dowding's Apple Juice & Cider

## IMPROVEMENTS

The process has revealed various ways to improve next time, including:

- Better 'clustering' of producers and more 'special events'
- Better scheduling of events to avoid clashes
- Tightening up our sustainability criteria and messaging
- Using forms on our website to automate registration of participants
- Earlier deadlines for registration, approvals, website completion etc

## LOOKING AHEAD

The priority, overall is to create a consistently high quality experience for all our visitors and participants whilst delivering key messages about the benefits of more widespread adoption of sustainable farming to a broad target audience.

What is clear, in the meantime, is that farmers continue to face unprecedented challenges and the pressures on our natural environment show little sign of abating. Fluctuation in global supply chains due to war and the pandemic further reveal the flaws in our centralised food system and the necessity of a more local and nature friendly approach. Closer to home, the abrupt closure of Somerset Local Food, local abattoirs, avian flu, and the impact of the cost of living crisis on buying habits, remind us of the vulnerability of smaller-scale local suppliers and the urgent need to mobilise support for them at a local and national policy level.

# A FLAVOUR OF THE FESTIVAL

Claire Moyes, working for the World Wildlife Fund, shares some of her experiences and conversations from her day visiting the Somerset Food Trail Festival

## 1 Somerset Sausage Company

10am, Tour, Wedmore

*A tour including information on how the pigs are kept and a demonstration of how the sausages are made.*

*...that's the difference between a really good quality sausage and a poor one. Their meat to fat ratio is at 80% lean to 20% fat.*

“

*I am passionate about them – I am there when the piglets are born, and I feed them, take them all the way through and they are only not with us for a couple of hours. For me to be able to combine the whole lot together, that's important. And it's to share that with people.*

- Owner

“

*I've never been anywhere where they make sausages before, so I thought it would be interesting*

- Visitor



## 2 The Good Life

All day, Farm and Shop, Shepton Mallet

“

*The farm started 2019, initially I only wanted to do it for myself and my family. And it just grew. I never thought three years ago that I'd have my own farm shop.*

*At the weekend we had a lot of people in that we've never seen before... I think more people are trying to buy into that way of shopping and living. I think a lot of people can afford to [just buy local]. But many of our customers can't afford it, but have made some choices about what they buy – so they will buy our meat once a week, rather than Tesco's every day.*

- Owner



## 3 Westcombe Dairy and Wild Beer Company

3pm, Tour and Tasting, Evercreech

*They realised that the best way to influence quality and flavour is about farming practices. So sustainability, carbon sequestering, welfare – thinking more about quality rather than quantity. Have overhauled their whole farming system.*

“

*The cheese maker was very interesting, and I loved the sampling, and I've bought some samples. I will try to eat more local cheeses, I am very into buying local. It has reinforced that.*

- Visitor

# What did we achieve? Outputs and outcomes



65,726

Number of people reached through SFT social media

## Press

ITV regional news, the Guardian, Independent, plus 20 more publications including The Levensayer, Blackmore Vale, Mendip Times



10,000

Brochures distributed

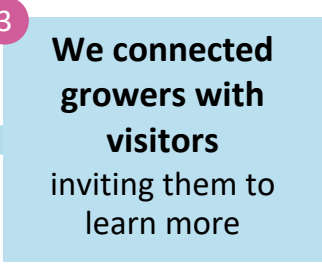
7,055

Unique visitors to the SFT website

1,500

Reactions, likes, and comments on social media

*"If more of us chose to buy sustainably grown food, we'll be... contributing to driving down carbon emissions, we'll also be helping the local economy and... our health."*



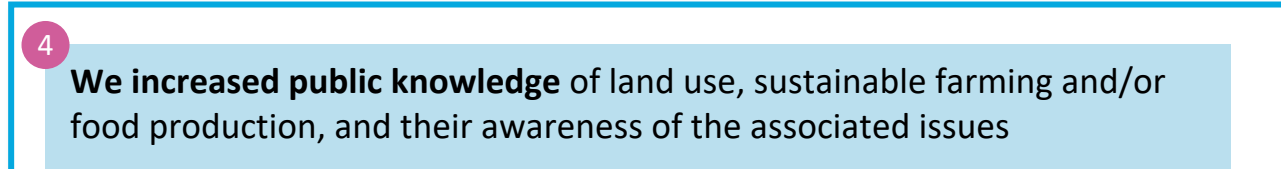
8,500

Visits to 247 Festival events across Somerset



- SFT map of participants

- Stewart Crocker, ITV News



8/10

visitors agreed they had increased their knowledge and awareness

*"I had a limited understanding before, but the event has certainly increased my curiosity on the subject"*

- Visitor



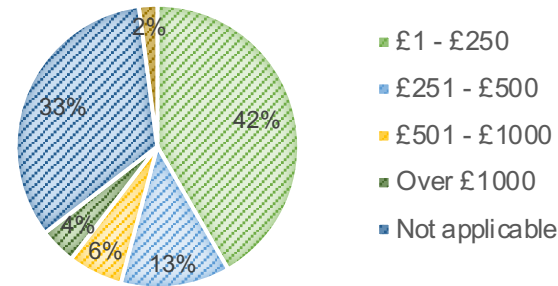
1/3

of surveyed visitors said they will begin or increase the amount of local or sustainable produce they buy as a result of attending the Trail

3/4

of surveyed visitors agreed they felt inspired to take action

If selling produce or products during the Festival, what was your approximate uplift in sales?



*"Yes we definitely had an uplift in our turnover... I think this will help us long term, if these events happen every year"*

- The Good Earth Natural Foods, Wells

**Significant?** 85% of participants would participate again

# What surprised us?

We connected a significantly **higher number of participants than expected**, helping develop **business to business** demand.

↑ 198  
138 more participants than our target of 60

**25%** of participants said they had identified new business to business opportunities or made new business contacts

“*Two pubs have trialled our drinks.... one of which is an independent chain with 5 other pubs in Somerset. A large cafe placed an order... with a view to placing regular orders. A local vineyard has confirmed they would also like to stock our drinks.*

– Dowding’s Apple Juice & Cider

We **increased the confidence of participants** to continue to open their doors and communicate about their work.

“*We are following several leads and ideas*

– The Bridge Bakery, Langport

“*It was the first time we had a public event on the farm, and since it went so well it's given us the confidence to do it again*

– Meadowsweet Farm, Frome

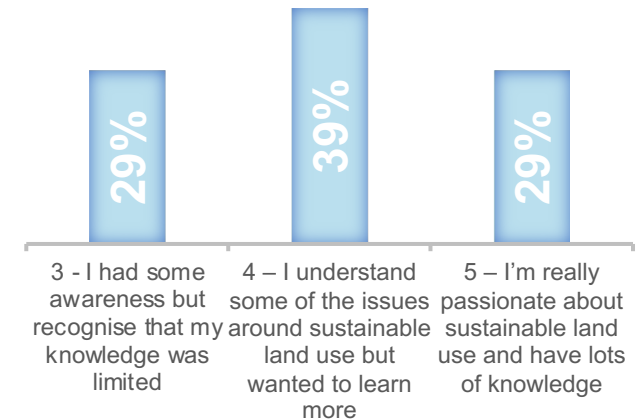
“*Really good to open the doors, it has made it more likely that we will be able to do it again in the future*

– Hinton Harvest, Hinton St George

# What variation was there?

- Artisanal drink makers tended to make the most money during the Festival, but not all
- Some events cost participants more money to put on than they made
- Events and participants were not universally well attended
- Visitors valued events and experiences and did not necessarily have a good experience when left to explore alone

29% of visitors had some, but limited, knowledge of land use, sustainable farming and/or food production before attending. For those with greater knowledge, the event was a ‘reminder’ to buy local and sustainably



# Who came?



50% male and 50% female

Families, and an even distribution of people aged 30 – 49, 50 – 64 and 65+

95% white ethnicity, with 5% of Asian/British Asian, mixed or other ethnicity (this broadly reflects Somerset’s ethnicity)

# Marketing effectiveness



## MARKETING ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

Media relations, social media and advertising aimed primarily to drive visitors to the new Somerset Food Trail website where information about the Trail was available in various searchable formats. Further details were available on social media and via newsletters.

- We created a new website for the Trail, with an interactive map, calendars of events for the cluster areas, and details of all 193 participating enterprises.
- The website also displayed a flipbook version of our 68-page printed festival programme (viewed over 7,000 times online).
- 10,000 copies of the printed Festival programme were distributed around the county – to participating food outlets, tourist offices, arts venues, railway stations, at events, etc.
- The website and brochure were promoted via media relations, social media, press advertising, flyers, and newsletters.
- Participating enterprises, local councils, partners (eg, Take Art) and other stakeholders were encouraged to promote the event on their social media, via newsletters and other channels, with Food Trail logos and graphic posts about the festival downloadable from the Food Trail festival website and via our Facebook page.
- Several local councils gave us ‘in kind’ exposure including adverts on digital message signs in prominent town centre locations, notice-boards in public places, town and parish magazines and websites.
- We booked a limited run of ‘boosted posts’ on Facebook, and organised a couple of competition giveaways – offering local hampers – to boost our following on social media.
- We placed a limited run of half page print ads in *The Leveller*, *Mendip Times*, *Blackmore Vale*, from May onwards, and secured press coverage in most of the key local media.
- We also secured some high-profile national media coverage (*The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *BBC Antiques* magazine etc). See next page for highlights.
- In the final weeks before the festival, we distributed advertising signage to key roadside locations around the county, and, small directional signs flyers and posters to participating outlets and in school bookbags at a number of primary/prep schools.

- A week before the Trail, we co-hosted a panel discussion featuring four experts on agroecology and nutrition on ‘The Future of Farming’, with Ebenezer Presents at the Seed Factory, Aller, to pre-promote the Trail.

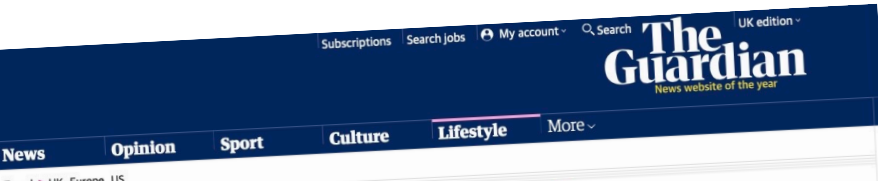
## LESSONS LEARNED

- Delays to the creation of our new website meant the final version was very late. The website must be ready to launch at least three months before the event.
- People loved the brochure, and kept it as a reference book for months afterwards.
- The biggest cost was the printed brochure – print costs doubled in the six-month run up to the event.
- The brochure could be an annual directory for a longer shelf life, with advertising, so it pays for itself.
- More video and better photos would help market the event next time (budget permitting)
- Need a social media specialist year round.
- Heavy reliance on volunteer time to execute the marketing may not be sustainable long term
- Need to consider alternative funding models, eg: commercial sponsorship and advertising, or promote the event purely online.

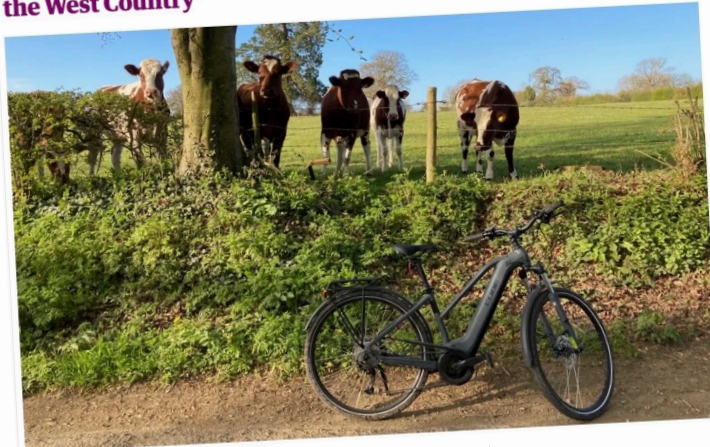
## METRICS FOR SUCCESS

- Growth in our social media following and mailing list
- Delivery of key messages re: local nature-friendly food to target audiences
- Positive feedback from participants and visitors
- Extent of press coverage
- Partnership and in kind marketing opportunities fully exploited for maximum exposure
- Increased profile of the event as a regular fixture in Somerset’s calendar
- Increased profile of Sustainable Food Somerset as an advocacy organisation focused on catalysing an expansion of nature-friendly farming in Somerset
- Growth in visitor numbers year on year

# Some media coverage highlights



## Cheese, cider, cycling: a tasty tour of the West Country



Our writer's e-bike attracts admirers in rural Somerset. Following the Somerset Food Trail by e-bike offers the chance to meet growers and makers, enjoy beautiful scenery and sample delicious local produce.

What more do you need than good cheese and a glass of cider? I'm at Batch Farm, in the Somerset village of East Pennard, and cheesemaker Malcolm Dyer is genially setting out his stall. The farm is one of the highlights of the Somerset Food Trail, a 10-day celebration of the county's smaller-scale food producers running until 24 July. The trail aims to highlight the area's bounty, offering visitors the chance to explore farms, meet growers, picnic in community farms and "food forests", sip cider while watching local bands, and generally guzzle, graze and shop to their stomach's content.

Somerset is a surprisingly extensive county, so the trail's organisers have helpfully sliced it into 11 areas. Setting out to get a taste of the terrain in advance, I decide to focus on the patch I know best - Bruton, Castle Cary and Wincanton - but to explore it anew on one of Bruton Bike Hire's guided electric cycle safaris. Ten of these tours will be running during the event, along two different routes, and I'm trialling the northern loop.

I meet my guide, Robin Bunche, on Bruton's High Street. This tiny town has punched its way into heavyweight food circles over recent years with the opening of At the Chapel, Roth Bar & Grill, Matt's Kitchen and Osip. Propping them up, however, is a thriving farm-to-table scene and - once Balme has set me up with a bike, helmet and hi-vis vest - the aim is to delve into it, fork-first.



## Showcase for locally produced food

The Somerset Food Trail Festival, from July 15th-24th, has early 190 venues signed up, promising a fantastic showcase for the county's smaller-scale, nature-friendly farmers and artisan producers, showing the value of buying locally. From body-magic vineyards to community-funked food forests, organic cheese making to rare breed pigs, apple orchards, aquaponics and cider making, buffalo mozzarella to milk-based vodka, the ten-day event offers a wealth of foodie experiences - and some cultural ones as well. Live performance and art will complement talks, tastings and tours in multiple destinations across the county. The festival offers the "behind-the-scenes" access to the farms, landscapes, places that produce Somerset's best, most flavourful...



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## Producers and retailers join Somerset Food



Aquaponics is part of the Somerset Food Trail Festival. By Antonio Scancarriello Digital Reporter @ascanca91



## Heritage with Bite

Proving there's more to the county's larder than stellar cheddar, this month's Somerset Food Trail (15th-24th July) invites visitors to delve, fork-first, into local culinary heritage. Highlights include the ciders and cider brandies (made in gleaming antique copper stills) at Burrow Hill and the Somerset Wine Company, whose Sweet Track gin nods to a local Neolithic timber walkway. somersetfoodtrail.uk



Frome joins Somerset Food Trail to celebrate local food heroes. FROME is prepped and ready to take part in this year's Somerset Food Trail Festival thanks to support from residents in Frome Town Council's People's Budget Event vote.

Take place from Friday 19th to Sunday 24th July, the mouth-watering food festival is a countywide farm to fork showcase celebrating local, sustainably produced food. This year Frome's beloved food producers and retailers will feature for the first time in the exciting programme of 170 venues across Somerset. Numerous providers are opening their doors for visitors, with an opportunity to see behind the scenes, enjoy delicious tastings and be inspired by the quality of fresh and local produce. Local businesses taking part include Vallis Veg, the Frome Food Hub, Frome Field 2 Fork, Rye Bakery, Marston Park, Meadowweet Beef and Palette and Pasture as well as Frome Community Fridge. Cllr Mark Dorrington said, "Frome has a reputation for doing things differently and the local food scene is no exception. From our wonderful independent high street to the many vibrant markets - explore the ways our local producers are demonstrating how farming can benefit people and planet."



THE ARTS DIARY - JULY THE ARTS DIARY - AUGUST 2022 ON NINE THINGS REVIEWS ARTS FESTIVALS FOOD FESTIVALS ECO-SOUNDINGS DIRECTORY CONTACT US ABOUT US

## Explore the Somerset Food Trail

SOMERSET is home to some of the finest and most innovative food producers in the country. From traditional farmhouse Cheddar to milk-based vodka, the county has a lot more to showcase at this year's Somerset Food Trail Festival, from 15th to 24th July.



"This is the Isle of Avalon; it's fertile," said Tina Cusden of Wild Garden, who runs market gardening workshops. "People love growing food." She was telling me about Somerset and its thriving gastro-scene - the essence of which has now been captured in a new Somerset Food Trail, launching in July, which will showcase some of the southwest's best artisanal food and drink producers.

The county is known for its cider and cheese - the limestone cliffs of Cheddar Gorge conceal ancient caves where Cheddar Man, a Mesolithic hunter-gatherer, once lived and where modern humans still store the famed cheese of the same name to this day. But the trail also incorporates everything from sausage-making to chocolate, along with tractor rides and organic farm tours from locals like Tie.





# Looking ahead

The Somerset Food Trail Festival will return in 2023 in a slightly different, more concentrated form, focusing on quality rather than quantity, building on the strong relationships developed in 2022 and the huge levels of awareness generated by this year's event, but also taking account of the insight from this report and valuable feedback received from visitors, participants and volunteers.

The festival organiser Wells Food Network has been renamed Sustainable Food Somerset and is changing its legal status to better enable the organisation to fulfil its county-wide ambitions. It is also refreshing its broader strategy, exploring the value of producing a series of events throughout the year in addition to the Somerset Food Trail Festival.



With thanks to Somerset artists Annabel Tempest for the illustrated map and Kate Lynch for the cover image.

Our 2022 sponsors



**Website:** [www.somersetfoodtrail.org](http://www.somersetfoodtrail.org)  
**Email:** [info@somersetfoodtrail.org](mailto:info@somersetfoodtrail.org)  
**Instagram:** [somersetfoodtrail22](https://www.instagram.com/somersetfoodtrail22)  
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**Next year's Festival:**  
**14-30 July 2023**