

Developing a short supply chain for beef

What is a short supply chain?

Short supply chains involve as few intermediaries in the chain as possible and connect the producer to the consumer. This gives the producer greater control over the whole process and provides the consumer with access to local, seasonal produce.

Advantages

- Producer meets their customers
- Customers understand provenance of product and have access to seasonal produce with full traceability
- Higher incomes – customers often willing to pay more and this all comes to you

Disadvantages

- Requires planning and management at every step of the process
- Requires new skills e.g. social media marketing, butchery, selling
- Investment in equipment, skills and time

Finding your customers

This requires time and effort to establish your customer base. Do some local research by visiting farmers markets, restaurants or farm shops. If your target market is high end restaurants and shops in cities you may need to include at least one intermediary (e.g. catering wholesaler) in your supply chain to provide you with access to these outlets. Investigate which outlets will provide you with the greatest returns.

Develop a brand

You will need your product to be visually attractive and appealing to your customers. Your brand needs to clearly communicate to your customers so that they know and understand what they are purchasing. Work with a professional to get this bit right and it could pay dividends in the long run.

Comply with legislation

Register your business with your local environmental health office at least 28 days before you begin trading. Your local authority can provide further information on how to register.

Develop a HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points) Plan. This will help you to demonstrate how you manage the food hygiene and safety procedures within your food business. The Food Standards Agency provides further information on how to do this.

Any members of staff who are handling food need to be trained in food hygiene and safety.

Labelling and packaging of your products needs to be appropriate and correct. Seek advice from Trading Standards and your local Environmental Health Officer.

Marketing your product

Social media provides cheap, instant access to a wide, potential customer base. If used effectively it can be a huge asset to your business but it takes time and understanding to do it well.

Websites can provide background information on your products as well as opportunities to create an online shop. This can increase your access to customers but also means you will need to develop appropriate packaging for postage. Take time to consider what is suitable for your product.

Selling your product

Decide how you want to reach your customers

Boxed meat schemes – direct to customer. Consider how you will package the meat and how it will be delivered.

Farmers markets – direct to customer. Create an attractive stall and engage with the customers. Packaging and visual appearance is important.

Farm shops/retail outlets – you have to compete with other similar products so brand and appearance are important. The shop/outlet will take a cut so while profits may be lowered you may have access to more customers.

Wholesale – opportunities for bulk selling but prices will be reduced. Harder to connect with your customer.

Selling direct to your customers can be hugely rewarding both in monetary terms and satisfaction of receiving positive feedback. However, don't underestimate the time commitment required to produce, market and sell your product. Do your homework to be sure whether this approach suits you before investing in new equipment and skills.