



Healthy school meals provide boost to local economy with a focus on quality and local sourcing

The Farm Kitchen was set up by owner Vicky Howe in 2006 as a one-person business working from a rented restaurant kitchen to provide hot lunches for four schools in Lincolnshire. Her passion for healthy, good food has been the catalyst behind the growth of the company which now employs seventy-five staff serving eighty-two schools in Lincolnshire with a head office based on a farm in Ewerby Thorpe.

In line with the Food for Life ethos, community and local links are a crucial part of their business. One of the areas where this has seen a very positive impact is in the recruitment of seventy-five employees from the surrounding area. Due to the working hours and flexible employment opportunities, many of these are working parents.

Supporting other local businesses is also a key to their involvement in the community. Vicky says, “We work with twenty to thirty local producers and we have been able to see how the increased trade has also benefitted them, including the creation of a number of employment positions. Whether it is by supporting farmers or a local label printing company our first choice is always to source locally.”

Vicky feels the core values of Food for Life tie in very closely with her own in many other ways, including reflecting the high quality of food they offer and the importance of getting schools on board to think about food differently. She says “When I first read the Food for Life Catering Mark criteria I realised it would be an ideal way of ‘rubber-stamping’ what we offer to schools, parents and children.”

Using the criteria as a development plan, The Farm Kitchen successfully applied for the gold Catering Mark the following year. She continues “The Catering Mark is a fantastic way of proving to schools

that we do what we say we do! I like the fact that it is a holistic approach and that there are different ways you can achieve the standard depending on what is important to your business and customers.”

The Farm Kitchen also sees the benefits of playing an active role supporting schools who are involved in the Food for Life Partnership; “I have always believed that we don’t just supply meals, we need to pass on some food knowledge and excitement for food and where it comes from. We also try to encourage schools to invite parents and community members into school. The Food for Life Partnership programme is a great tool for helping us to do this.”

So what’s next? “To be able to offer what we do to more people across Lincolnshire and Rutland, alongside trying to educate children more in terms of where their food has come from and encourage them to grow and cook more.”

Facts and Figures:

Independent evaluation of the programme by new economics foundation showed that for every £1 invested in Food for Life menus, the social, economic and environmental return on investment is £3.

Notes:

The Food for Life Catering Mark is an accreditation scheme, run by the Soil Association, that provides a step-by-step route to sustainable catering. It was created through the Food for Life Partnership, a BIG Lottery funded initiative which works with schools to enhance the health and wellbeing of pupils and parents through the improving their food culture.

Open to caterers in both the public and private sectors, the Mark has three tiers: bronze, silver and gold, with the gold standard requiring the caterer’s menu to be 75% freshly prepared, 50% local and 30% organic. For more information on the FFL Catering Mark, please visit: www.sacert.org/catering

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