

# Community engagement to support product take up

Knowing your customer base and potential audience for your products is important to encourage take up once you have launched your product.

## Research: What, why, who, where and when?

Carrying out research in the early stages of planning a new food product can be really helpful to guide your thinking on why your product will be needed in such a busy marketplace. Finding this out will help shape who your audience is and why they may need or want to buy your product. Your main aims for your products, needs to be clear such as creating nutritious meals for people leaving hospital, meeting a low or specific price point or creating a dish suitable for a specific dietary requirement, or avoidance of allergen content which could restrict suitability. Once you know the overall aim for your product, this can help shape who your audience is and how you can engage them to buy your products.

## Engaging your market

Your research phase is a good time to start engaging your audience and future buyers of your product. Consider trialling products through sampling events for your potential customer groups through social meetings, local retailers, focus groups or a shared dinner. Ask for honest feedback and consider asking what people may think of price points, how they cook at home or what is important to them when cooking or choosing food.

## Cultural and religious requirements for foods

If you live in a culturally and religiously diverse community you may also need to think about creating a product that is appropriate to specific faiths, especially if your products contain animal products. Carry out research, ask questions and have recipes that can be adapted. Consideration may include such issues as suitability for vegetarians, vegans, or 'free from' claims, Kosher, Halal, approval for coeliacs, organic, to name but a few.

## Matching values and sharing your story

Many people want to buy products that match their values or support their local community. Document your journey of creating your product, share stories of your staff and volunteers and share your values e.g. using food that would otherwise go to waste or ways that you are supporting your local community. Use social media, your local paper or radio, networks and schools to shout about your project and new products. Other considerations will include sourcing of local ingredients and possible provenance of products to support sales.

## How can meals be made available community wide?

Once you have products that are suitable for retail or wholesale and have identified your potential customers, how are you going to get them out to your community? Use your research phase to start identifying potential outlets or retailers. Speak to community organisations or leaders to see if they can support, e.g. with contacts at hospitals discharging patients, small independent shops, farm shops, veg box delivery schemes, markets or events or through a local wholesaler. Ensuring that your meals are available at convenient locations is important for take-up.

## Keeping up engagement once you've launched

Don't stop shouting about your products once you've launched. Once your meals are launched keep up the promotion to continue the engagement. Can you have a new product launch lunch every few months, or a shared dinner? Write a customer or stakeholder newsletter about your organisation, share new link ups with groups and retailers or share your news and products with your networks.

## Links and further guidance

<https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/FaithsPosterA2.pdf>  
<https://thrivemeetings.com/2018/01/religious-dietary-restrictions-guide/>

